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Presidential press conferences as Richard Nixon used them.

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PRESIDENTIAL PRESS CONFERENCES AS RICHARD NIXON USED THEM

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Effective Public Relations is not mentioned again within the text of this thesis, but the book's influence on the research deserves special note. Many of the principles used to evaluate presidential press conferences were taken from that text, co-authored by Scott M. Cutlip.

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INTRODUCTION

> The press and the President--any President--in their natural state are friendly enemies. They both believe in each other; but they both, at some points along the way, disapprove of the way the other one does his job. . . . The news equation between reporters and the President can never be balanced. Reporters want to know everything. And Presidents want to tell them less than they should--or could.[1]

Scheduled presidential press conferences passed their sixty-first anniversary in March, 1974. Therefore, it seems appropriate to reassess the presidential meetings with the press and their role in government-citizen communication. Several facts suggest a study at this time of this unique presidential-press institution--presidential press conferences. Their use has made them a recognized form of presidential communication in the United States; their format has been changed by each White House administration. As a rule, either presidents or the press have been dissatisfied with their number and/or format; in the Nixon administration they were used less than in any past administration since the inauguration of the formally scheduled press conference.

The meetings with the press are the primary institutionalized form of communication that permit

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[1]Hugh Sidey, John F. Kennedy, President (New York, 1964), p. 104.

dialogue between a president and the Fourth Estate, and thus, between a chief executive and his American publics. Other forms of transmission, extending from leaks at one extreme to speeches at the other, are one-way by nature, lack necessary feedback to the president and are more controlled forms of presidential communication than press conferences. Indeed, former Presidential Press Secretary George Reedy has said that presidential press conferences are the only area of communication that allow a president to ". . .brush up against reality with regularity."[2]

In the most recent Presidential administration, President Nixon was accused by the Associated Press Managing Editor's Association of ". . .killing off the presidential press conference."[3] Nixon had the fewest news conferences of record since the advent of the scheduled press conference during the Woodrow Wilson administration. Nixon, moreover, steadily decreased the number of televised press meetings during his term in office. Further, he turned away from the generally accepted format of the press conference to interviews and partisan-type news conferences as media criticism increased about his administration's Watergate scandal. This raises questions concerning presidential press conferences of the future.

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[2]George Reedy, "Some Questions for the President," New York Times, January 6, 1971, p. 6.

[3]New York Times, February 4, 1972, p. 10.

The main purposes of this study were to examine Nixon's uses of presidential press conferences, his views of presidential press conferences as well as the increasingly abrasive relationship with the press as reflected in his press conferences. For purposes of comparison, secondary attention was given to other presidential views, uses of, and problems with press conferences to provide a base line for examining Nixon's conferences. Finally, problems involved in presidential news conferences and methods of improvement were examined.

James E. Pollard's two-volume study titled, The Presidents and the Press, and The Presidents and the Press, Truman to Johnson, is the most exhaustive history of the American presidential press conference. Pollard offers few solutions for improving news conferences, however, and his work ends with the Johnson administration. Delbert McGuire's doctoral dissertation, "Democracy's Confrontation: The Presidential Press Conference," was published in 1967. McGuire focused on the problems of the presidential press conference as seen by correspondents, White House press aides, and former President Eisenhower. A second dissertation, "The Use of Radio and TV by Presidents of the United States," completed by Glen D. Phillips in 1968, bears on this thesis.

Two M.A. theses relate to this study. "The

Presidential Press Conference: Nixon and Kennedy in the 'First 100 Days'," by Dorothy Dunn, of the University of Georgia, 1969, is a comparison of Nixon and Kennedy press conference problems and news generated at presidential press conferences during their "honeymoons" with the media. The second thesis, "Television and Presidential Politics 1952-1970," by Afton Auld, of the University of Kansas, 1970, is an examination of the relationship between television and four presidential administrations.

Numerous books have been written that include frequent mention of presidential press conferences. Those most relied upon for this thesis were George Reedy's, The Twilight of the Presidency, William J. Small's, Political Power and the Press and David Wise's, The Politics of Lying. In 1971, Edward P. Morgan (et al.) transcribed the proceedings of several correspondents at the Rational Debate Seminars in Washington, D.C., sponsored by the American Enterprise Institute in a short volume titled, The Presidency and the Press Conference. Comments by various seminar members provided much of the general background information for this research.

None of the work noted above encompasses all of the Nixon press conferences, nor do the studies accommodate the task of studying the history of the

news sessions in terms of the advent of radio and TV. No research focuses exclusively on the history of presidential press conferences. Such a history would provide a measuring device for Nixon press meetings.

The basic questions that served as guidelines for this research and writing were:

1. How have scheduled presidential press conferences changed since their beginning in 1913?
2. What outside factors might have contributed to presidential press conferences diminishing?
3. Since 1945, as press conferences have generally dwindled, have speeches and press statements increased?
4. Why was Nixon accused of ". . .killing off the presidential press conference."?
5. In light of Nixon's problems with them, how can presidential press conferences be made workable in a society of instant mass communication?

A review of primary and secondary sources was conducted in the Wisconsin State Historical Library and the Memorial Library at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Primary sources included presidential press conference transcripts and press interpretive reaction

available on microfilm. Transcripts used were taken from the New York Times, The Congressional Quarterly and Public Papers of the Presidents. Selected transcripts of key press conferences as defined by historians and viewed by media spokesmen, dating back to the Eisenhower administration, were reviewed in terms of the specific objectives noted above.

Questionnaires aimed at improving presidential press conferences were mailed to available past presidential press secretaries asking them to comment on the advisability of informal presidential news conferences called on short notice, held in conjunction with a single scheduled televised monthly meeting with the press.

Questionnaire responses were disappointing. Of the half-dozen only two were answered: those of George Reedy and George E. Christian. Their suggestions are relied on frequently in this research. Most other presidential press secretary observations regarding press conferences were gleaned from secondary sources.

The framework of this manuscript will start with a discussion of press conferences as one of several modes of communication from a president to the American people, and then examine the institution of the scheduled presidential press conference since its birth in March 1913. Next, this history will take readers

through the formative Richard Nixon years, looking at some of his views of the press from his involvement in the Alger Hiss case to the 1968 eve of his first term as President. A chapter will be devoted to each of Nixon's terms as President of the United States. Finally, this paper will offer some alternatives for consideration regarding the future of presidential press conferences.

A procedural problem with definitions needs some space in this introduction. Early in research difficulty was found with deciding exactly what were to be called Nixon press conferences. Other historians have had the same problem.[4] The following definition was finally selected for this analysis: "any scheduled meeting by the President with ten or more members of the press where questions were asked, and answered, and recorded verbatim." Until the Roosevelt administration, even that definition will cause a communication historian problems. The number "ten," selected to define the

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[4]Delbert McGuire, "Democracy's Confrontation: The Presidential Press Conference, I," Journalism Quarterly, (Vol. 44, No. 4.) Winter, 1967, p. 639. McGuire defined presidential press conferences as: ". . .those meetings between the President and the press for an exchange of questions and answers provided that the transcript is on record." That definition would have included Nixon's "conversations" and interviews and was, therefore, rejected.

requisite reporter population at a press conference, was arbitrary and selected to separate conferences from group interviews and so forth. Presidential press statements, where reporters are allowed no questions, are likewise excluded from the definition. Attendance by radio or television representatives was not a criteria in the definition.

Other procedural problems included differentiating between "formal" and "informal" press conferences. For this research a formal presidential news conference was defined simply as one scheduled at least 12 hours in advance.

Much of the data in Tables III and IV were taken from research by Pollard and Wise and are so footnoted. Where data have been updated, this writer has used the New York Times Index as his primary source.

The terms "press conference" and "news conference" have the same meaning in this research.

Before moving to the subject of development of presidential news conferences some general comments about their place in the public information system and their characteristics are needed.

The press conference is, of course, only one of several methods of presidential communication. A listing of other modes is extensive and includes both legal and extra-legal channels and devices for the

President to communicate to the American public, and to the world. James Pollard in The Presidents and the Press, Truman to Johnson lists 25 alternatives that include formal messages, proclamations, White House statements, official memos, speeches, executive orders, presidential letters, fireside chats, radio and TV broadcasts, press secretary announcements, and so forth. Of the presidential alternatives noted, he says probably about a half dozen are used as major tools in communicating with publics. He includes the use of rumors, or leaks, and backgrounders as means of communication.[5]

One may establish a communication continuum of attribution that ranges from a rumor or leak at one extreme, evolves to a deep backgrounder, then to a backgrounder, then to attributed statements and announcements by the president's staff. In the center is the press conference itself. From there the continuum moves to the other more formal extreme of press statements, speeches and executive orders. The link with the obscuring devices and easily identifiable executive communication is the presidential press conference.

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[5]James E. Pollard, The Presidents and the Press, Truman to Johnson, (Washington, D.C., 1964), pp. 13-15.

Dorothy Dunn made an important point regarding the importance of presidential press conferences:

> Any leverage the President has acquired in the law-making process has been indirect, based on use of persuasion and ultimately grounded in the popular support he can claim or mobilize at a given time. Except for the veto, the President has no constitutional means of either setting major policy himself or forcing the legislative branch to his views. Hence his link with the public is his key relationship.[6]

The press conference provides one of the most rapid links with the public and as such becomes a tool for presidential reception as well as transmission. News conferences, perhaps because of that unique quality, have been almost without exception a source of controversy.

They have several advantages. News conferences provide a president with a direct means of announcing his policy, or action, and explaining his thinking surrounding those matters. The meetings with the press provide immediate national, and worldwide communication of matters of significance and interest to the public. News conferences are a form of alerting and shaping

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[6]Dorothy Dunn, "The Presidential Press Conference: Nixon and Kennedy in the 'First 100 Days,'" M.A. Thesis, University of Georgia, 1969, p. 3. Hereafter cited as Dunn, "Presidential Press Conference."

public opinion. Finally, they are an opportunity for the American people to question their chief, albeit via the press, on his policy, and tend to make him responsive to his publics.[7]

Press conferences have disadvantages, however. They lack regularity and uniformity. A president may elect not to answer questions put to him by the press by rebuking the reporter, relying on a "no comment" answer, or simply evading the question. Depending on one's view, another disadvantage is that the president is at the mercy of grandstanding reporters who may be more interested in their personal image than in the question they are putting to the president. More, the impromptu nature of the news conference lends itself toward presidential innaccuracies in matters of fact.[8] Beyond those drawbacks are problems of a president using the news conference as a political advantage over opponents, his telling only one side of the story or simply placing an "embargo" on news.[9]

A press conference with too many reporters, limited

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[7]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, Truman to Johnson, p. 24.

[8]Ibid., p. 25.

[9]William J. Small, Political Power and the Press, (New York, 1972), pp. 143-45.

to a time frame of about 30 minutes after a long period of news conference inactivity, is conducive to a confused and boisterous meeting as reporters compete for presidential attention. The situation needs improvement with respect to allowing a more orderly environment and follow-up questioning. Improvement must be made, however, without sacrificing the full and free discussion of American presidential press meetings.

Conference advantages and disadvantages must be weighed against the usefulness of the press conference as a fact-finding tool not only for the press and the people, but also for a president. White House correspondent Helen Thomas has noted the value of a press conference in questioning the chief executive on information that the president would not normally volunteer.[10] George Reedy, on the other hand, believes the press to be the most effective social institution tending to keep a president in touch with reality.[11]

As will be seen in the first Chapter, the difficulties found in press conferences have not been confined to any single presidential administration.

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[10]Edward P. Morgan et al., The Presidency and the Press Conference, (Washington, D.C., 1971), pp. 42-43.

[11]George E. Reedy, The Twilight of the Presidency, (New York, 1970), p. 99.

Each president has had to find his own method for conferences and the press has had to adjust. Presidential success has varied with respect to those extra-legal and non-Constitutional meetings with the Fourth Estate; those successes and failures will be reviewed here next for the purpose of establishing a base line for evaluation of President Nixon's press conferences.

CHAPTER I

THE PRESIDENTIAL PRESS CONFERENCE

FROM WILSON TO JOHNSON

> In our America we have the finest and best press in the world. In its power today only the press can sound the warning and reason to that conviction which will enable us to play our full part in this work of preservation of our world civilization.
>
> --Warren G. Harding[1]
> April 1923

This chapter will examine aspects of various chief executives' news conferences for events relevant to development and diminution of press conferences as a means of presidential communication with the American people. As such, it will discuss salient events in the evolution of the press conference that brought it to its present-day form. Past presidential views, uses and problems with the meetings, as well as influences by press secretaries and the electronic media, will be used to focus on the use and decline of the press conference in the Nixon administration.

The first presidential press conference, called as

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[1]James E. Pollard, The Presidents and the Press, (New York, 1946), p. 711.

a scheduled event, was held on March 15, 1913 by Woodrow Wilson.[2] Although press conferences had been held earlier by other presidents, the administration of Wilson is used as a starting point for this research because he initiated them as regularly scheduled events. In that historic meeting Wilson expressed the hope that newsmen would help the public understand important issues and disregard trivia. Described as nervous and embarrassed because of the large number of reporters (125), he expressed his views of the meetings:

> I sent for you. . .to ask that you go into partnership with me, that you lend me your assistance as nobody else can, and then after you have brought. . .opinion into Washington, let us try and make true gold here that will go out from Washington.3

He viewed news conferences as an important source of feedback, saying ". . .do not tell the country what Washington is thinking, for that does not make any difference. Tell Washington what the country is thinking. . . ."[4]

Presidential Secretary Joseph Tumulty standing

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[2]Ibid., p. 636.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid.

behind the President--Wilson was seated at his desk--reacted with marked surprise when Wilson referred the press to "My Dear Friend Tumulty" [sic] for general press information.[5]

Tumulty has been described as the "first secretary to have a flair for public relations." Called the "Weather-vane" of the administration, the 34 year-old Irishman was noted for sensing the sentiment of the country and ". . .the state of mind of the people." He created an early press digest, called the "Yellow Journal"--news clippings were pasted on long yellow sheets--used to analyze press sentiment. There were no public opinion polls: newspapers and magazines, along with political scouts, were used to provide Wilson his needed feedback, imperfect though it may have been.[6]

Wilson's biweekly press conferences were not considered successful by some historians. The President considered the newspapermen's questions undignified, and left his press relations more and more to Tumulty as time passed.[7]

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[5]New York Times, March 16, 1913, p. 2.

[6]John M. Blum, Joe Tumulty and the Wilson Era, (Boston, 1951), p. 61.

[7]Ibid., pp. 61-65.

Wilson is credited with introducing off-the-record remarks at the meetings, frequently prefacing a statement with ". . .this is not to be printed but is just a guide to you." He did not select press conference subject matter and let reporters roam to whatever subjects they liked.[8]

The fledgling electronic media had no influence on Wilson's press conferences, of course. Wilson was, however, photographed on silent film[9] and delivered his "Fourteen Points" speech to a world public by wireless. In 1918 Wilson used radio for a broadcast, but the medium was still in its infancy and only a small number of listeners was able to hear him. They heard mostly fleeting, almost indistinguishable words.[10]

The Wilson news conferences were finally stopped when the President became angered at what he believed was unnecessary prying into his family life, especially that of his daughters.[11] That occurred after the sinking of the Lusitania, in 1915, and the need for

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[8]Small, Political Power and the Press, pp. 80-81.

[9]New York Times, December 5, 1913, p. 20.

[10]Glen D. Phillips, "The Use of Radio and Television by Presidents of the United States," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1968, p. 49. Hereafter cited as Phillips, "Radio and Television."

[11]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, p. 637.

war-time security was listed as the reason for the cessation. When the President stopped seeing reporters himself, Secretary Tumulty served as the intermediary. He gave out news, answered some questions and, when necessary, relayed queries to Wilson. Between 1915 and 1917, however, Tumulty's influence on Wilson waned and with the passage of the Espionage Act in June 1917, George Creel and the Committee on Public Information became the White House link with the public.[12]

Records of Wilsonian press conferences do not give precise figures of the number of press conferences that he held. He is said to have conducted the conferences twice each week, from 1913 to 1915, however.[13]

Woodrow Wilson's primary contribution to the Presidential press conference was converting the previous haphazard relationship of press meetings to a standardized forum. His recognition of its importance enhanced the influence of White House correspondents and gave the President direct access to a vital communication channel.[14]

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[12]Elmer E. Cornwell, Jr., Presidential Leadership of Public Opinion, (Bloomington, Indiana, 1965), p. 32; Pollard, Presidents and the Press, pp. 659-83.

[13]Ibid., Pollard, p. 630.

[14]Ibid., p. 691.

Regular press conferences were revived in 1921 when Warren Gamaliel Harding, an Ohio newspaper publisher, came to office.[15] As with Woodrow Wilson, the exact number of news conferences held by the 29th President has not been determined accurately. No verbatim records were made. It is known, however, that Harding made the press conference a permanent, scheduled event and held one twice weekly.[16] Historians have found evidence of 16 press conferences during the first three months of the Harding administration with the attribution "high officials in the Administration."[17] Harding has been credited with creating the "White House spokesman" device which sometimes prohibited reporters from quoting a president directly.[18] The technique of the "White House spokesman" rule was unpopular with reporters, but was continued by his successorsuntil Franklin Delano Roosevelt took office.[19]

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[15]Small, Political Power and the Press, p. 81.

[16]Donald F. Keller, "George Christian and the Press Relations of Warren G. Harding from Marion, Ohio, to the White House." M.A. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1972. p. 158. Hereafter cited as Keller, George Christian."

[17]Ibid.

[18]Small, Political Power and the Press, p. 81.

[19]Ibid., p. 84.

In an interview in July 1971, John F. Christian--son of George B. Christian, Jr., Harding's "press" secretary--explained the non-attribution policy of the Harding Presidency:

> Harding wanted to give the reporters the real inner workings of the Presidency. That was why he chose to meet with them after the Cabinet discussions. When he spoke confidentially (off the record) he wanted his confidence preserved. He also felt that not being quoted directly would leave the door open for a freer exchange of questions and information.[20]

The rule was not always applicable, however: instances have been found where Harding was quoted directly.[21]

The Harding Presidency was first in requiring written questions be submitted in advance of a press conference by newsmen.[22] A question box was installed outside the Presidential Office, and reporters filed questions in writing before they entered the conference. (An historical inaccuracy is that the box was installed as a result of a Presidential faux pas on December 20, 1921, in press conference remarks regarding Japan's status in a proposed Four-Power Treaty that included

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[20]Keller, "George Christian," p. 148.

[21]New York Times, March 8, 1921, p. 1.

[22]Small, Political Power and the Press, p. 81.

France, Great Britain and the U.S. Donald F. Keller successfully disproves that hypothesis by showing the policy of written questions was announced at an earlier conference on November 29 and first used on December 2, 1921.[23]

Harding's press conferences attracted over 100 reporters as a rule, and the written questions continued at least as late as March 1923, five months before his death.[24]

The one-time publisher of the Marion (Ohio) Star reportedly viewed the Fourth Estate as an important part of presidential communication. Robert T. Barry, Washington correspondent of Editor & Publisher, wrote in 1924 that ". . .[Harding has] a very keen appreciation of the fact that newspaper men [sic] represent the public in Washington."[25]

Election year 1920 is generally regarded by scholars as the year of radio's birth as a practical instrument of communication.[26] Harding used the new medium

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[23]Keller, "George Christian" pp. 155-58.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, p. 703.

[26]Phillips, "Radio and Television," p. 50.

periodically during his administration, even up to his fateful Alaskan tour in 1923. The Presidential car of his train was specially equipped for public broadcasts. The President spoke over WEAR from Baltimore and KSD in St. Louis that year. According to the New York Times, however, he was not altogether successful. The Times noted the "mechanical contrivances" worried him, he thought too much about the microphone and his speaking manner was affected.[27] One edition, noting his broadcast went "hundreds of miles" said the President was hindered, being glued to "the mouthpiece of the radio-telephone amplifiers."[28] Harding, sometimes forgetting he was "live," left his microphone while gesturing to his audience.

Other media were in an experimental status during Harding's administration. The President, however, was given an invitation by a committee of the Motion Picture Theater Owners Association to use motion pictures to reach the nation "for the welfare of the people." Harding urged the use of Governmental (Naval) radio facilities for press and commercial messages.[29]

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[27] Ibid., p. 51.

[28] New York Times, June 25, 1923, p. 2.

[29] Ibid., May 19, 1921, p. 17; March 26, 1922, p. 2.

Warren Harding brought the advantage of a newsman's point of view to the White House. By reinforcing Wilson's pattern of press conferences and by keeping them on a permanent basis, Harding reinforced official recognition of a still developing mode of presidential communication.

When Calvin Coolidge entered the White House, he came as no stranger to press conferences. Though he was reticent to use them as Vice-President, believing they could embarrass the Chief Executive, he had conducted them frequently as Governor of Vermont.[30] It was a surprise to newsmen, however, that Coolidge, who had been "an almost impossible source of copy" as Vice-President, continued the Harding tradition of two press conferences a week. He retained the basic mechanics of his predecessor's news conferences although he did allow impromptu follow-up questions to written queries.[31] The 30th President saw the press regularly during his term in office, for a yearly average of 87 Presidential press conferences.[32]

His press conferences have been described as dull

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[30]Robert A. Woods, The Preparation of Calvin Coolidge, (Boston, 1924), p. 165 and 246.

[31]Ibid., p. 248; Pollard, Presidents and the Press, p. 715.

[32]Small, Political Power and the Press, p. 82.

and pallid. Frank R. Kent, a Baltimore Sun correspondent, wrote an article about the Coolidge news conferences in the American Mercury:

> Mr. Coolidge does not smile. He utters no greeting, does not even nod his head. There is a dour, discouraged look about him. He seems not to be pleased. He puts on his horn-rimmed glasses, glances at the top question of the sheaf he holds in his hand, and passes it to the bottom. He silently reads a second question and passes that to the bottom, too. The reporters are respectfully expectant. Finally, he finds a question which he reads aloud and answers, then another, and another. His voice corresponds to his appearance. What he says is mostly non-committal, neutral, evasive. To many questions he replies that he has no exact information on the subject but expects to have it shortly, or that he is informed some department has the matter in hand and is handling it in a satisfactory manner. Even when his replies are definite, which is rare, they are flat and meatless. . . .[33]

Coolidge appeared to view newspaper conferences as a means for making an appeal directly to the country. Pollard notes that Coolidge showed no particular sign of realizing the value of news conference feedback, and viewed the sessions primarily as one-way communication from the President to the people.[34]

By 1923 radio was becoming an increasingly important mode of presidential communication. Coolidge--perhaps heeding advice that radio could conserve his strength

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[33]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, p. 719.

[34]Ibid., pp. 714-18.

and help avert a repetition of the tragic deaths of Wilson and Harding--turned to the media more than his predecessors. He delivered what might be considered the first "network" Presidential broadcast in a message to Congress, carried by six stations in December 1923. The next year a coast-to-coast network of 22 stations carried one of his speeches. The N.Y. Times called him "extremely popular as a radio speaker," and Coolidge substantially agreed:

> I am very fortunate that I came in with radio. I can't make an engaging, rousing, or oratorical speech to a crowd. . .but I have a good radio voice, and now I can get my message across to them without acquainting them with my lack of oratorical ability or without making any rhetorical display in their presence.[35]

In all, Coolidge made over 40 radio addresses during his term in office.

In 1924 a "phonofilm," a combination of a taped radio speech synchronized with one of Coolidge's silent films was made, but research fails to reveal if it was ever improved on in that form. The "phonofilm" concept gave way to "talkies," though Coolidge never made use of them.[36]

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[35]Phillips, "Radio and Television," p. 52.

[36]New York Times, March 3, 1929, Sect. IX, p. 18; August 12, 1924, p. 38; March 9, 1929, p. 13.

Coolidge had some problems with press conferences other than their monotony. On one occasion he was angered when a reporter made editorial note of a passed-by question and Presidential silence. Coolidge criticized the news report saying it was not in the spirit of his press conference rules.[37] Another time, Coolidge departed from the Harding rule of no direct quotation and allowed newsmen to quote him directly on the subject of brokers' loans, causing a charge that the President had helped encourage an inflationary trend. The incident prompted Coolidge to write in his autobiography, "The words of the President have enormous weight, and ought not to be used indiscriminately."[38]

Probably Coolidge's greatest contribution to Presidential press conferences was simply his insistence on their continuation.

Herbert Hoover had 34 press conferences during his first two years in office. Like Coolidge, he continued the custom of using written questions at his meetings.[39] He began his term as President, however,

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[37]New York Times, May 18, 1927, p. 27.

[38]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, pp. 725-27.

[39]Small, Political Power and the Press, p. 82.

by making an announcement at his first press conference that would partially abolish the rule of not quoting the President directly, and allow some news to be used in background form.[40] Hoover made the announcement to some 200 surprised reporters while standing, hand in pocket, behind his desk. The New York Times lauded the "death of the White House spokesman," and quoted the President directly in his first meeting with the press. Hoover's motive was one of avoiding embarrassment to himself or other officials because of ambiguous attribution. He promised that for complete clarity, he would either dictate quotes to reporters or provide them "transcripts of stenographic reports of his words."[41]

Hoover used press conferences and press statements interchangeably. As his number of press conferences decreased during the Depression, his press statements increased. A tabulation of his Presidential years shows the trend:[42]

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[40]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, p. 741.

[41]New York Times, March 6, 1929, p. 5; March 7, p. 24; March 17, Sect. III, p. 1 and 4; February 3, Sect. III, p. 1.

[42]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, p. 741.

	Press Conferences	Press Statements
1929-30	23	8
1930-31	16	17
1931-32	15	34
1932-33	12	26
Totals	66	85

Another innovation of the Hoover administration was the official creation of the post of presidential press secretary.[43] The President divided the responsibilities of presidential secretary into a larger four-man "Secretariat." One member of the new organization was George Akerson whose tasks mostly related to dealing with the press. Because of that, Akerson is generally regarded as the first presidential press secretary. His duties were to facilitate press conferences and press release dates as well as to coordinate Presidential appearances or endorsements. Akerson also conducted press briefings.[44] Briefings by the press secretary were short-lived, however, and fell into disuse after about three months when

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[43] Theodore G. Joslin, Hoover Off the Record, (New York, 1934), p. 77.

[44] Marietta A. Pane, "George E. Akerson: First Presidential Press Secretary," M.A. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1969, passim. Hereafter cited as Pane, "George Akerson."

reporters suspected the secretary either did not know the facts, or was trying to cover them up.[45] Akerson resigned after two years and was replaced by Theodore Joslin who was described as generally unapproachable by the press.[46]

Joslin, in his book, Hoover Off the Record, did provide some information regarding Hoover's sense of feedback:

> [Hoover] read the metropolitan press daily. . . supplementing these by maintaining an elaborate clipping bureau. Articles were selected from 500 daily papers scattered over the country, representing all shades of public opinion.[47]

As the chilling certainty of a depression became apparent to him, Hoover is said to have used press releases to inform the public and "cushion the first shock of the Depression."[48]

During the last months of his administration, Hoover's isolation increased and press conference cancellations were frequent: between June and

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[45]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, p. 742.

[46]Charles F. O'Donnell, Jr., "Stephen Tyree Early: F.D.R.'s Press Secretary," M.S. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1967, p.15. Hereafter cited as O'Donnell, "Stephen Tyree Early."

[47]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, p. 763.

[48]William S. Myers and Walter H. Newton, The Hoover Administration, (New York, 1936), p. 15; 23 and 45.

mid-September 1932, Hoover saw the press only eight times, two conferences were cancelled in one week in November 1932, and during his four lame-duck months in office no press conferences were conducted. James E. Pollard describes the Hoover administration as having Presidential press relations more strained than any president since Theodore Roosevelt.[49]

Hoover had made one radio-telephone speech regarding the economy about a month after his inauguration, and had spoken 37 times on radio after 22 months in office.[50] Sound movies, as a matter of record, had become functional and were scheduled for Hoover's inauguration.[51]

At one point Hoover made a prophetic point regarding radio, one that went unheeded in the Nixon administration when he said that radio's worth ". . .depends on the use that is made of it. It is not the ability to transmit, but the character of what is transmitted that really counts."[52]

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[49]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, pp. 768-69.

[50]New York Times, April 18, 1929, p. 4; December 28, 1930, p. 1.

[51]Ibid., February 10, 1929, p. 3. Television was also under consideration for reproducing the inaugural ceremonies. The plan, however, was dropped for unknown reasons.

[52]Phillips, "Radio and Television," pp. 53-54.

Certainly the forces arrayed against President Hoover were among the severest of those facing any man who had occupied the White House. Economic problems increased his isolation and the final years of his administration saw his relations sour with the press. His greatest contribution to news conferences was probably made during his first meeting with the press when he relaxed the "White House spokesman" rule.

The Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidency, in terms of press meetings, was the most innovative since Woodrow Wilson began regular news conferences.

Franklin Roosevelt conducted press conferences on an average of two a week during his twelve years as President for a total of 998.[53] Midway through his first term, he had conducted far more of them than would any of his successors during the same periods of time.[54]

Roosevelt stopped the custom of written questions at his first news conference, defined conditions that would allow him to be quoted directly, and delineated

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[53]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, Truman to Johnson, p. 8.

[54]New York Times, November 20, 1970, p. 41. A breakdown for the same time frame for later presidents goes as follows:

Truman	- 84
Eisenhower	- 53
Kennedy	- 44
Johnson	- 85
Nixon	- 16

what he meant by "back-grounders" and "off the record" statements. See Appendix A.

Roosevelt increased his popularity with the press by his invention of the "lid," a device that allowed reporters to leave the White House during nights and weekends when "the lid was on," knowing no news would break in their absence, or that they would be recalled should news be in the making.[55]

Perhaps another reason for Roosevelt's popularity with the press was his habit of attacking publishers and newspaper owners, rather than reporters, in what the President saw as an adversary relationship.[56] Roosevelt's biographer, J.M. Burns, commented on the President's "news quizzes":

> . . .He made so much news and maintained such a friendly attitude toward the newspapermen covering the White House that he quickly and easily won their sympathy. The newspapermen were especially pleased that the President had reinstituted the press conference, thus enabling them to question him directly.[57]

Merriman Smith began his 30-year career of

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[55]Small, Political Power and the Press, p. 83.

[56]Ibid.

[57]James MacGregor Burns, Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox, (New York, 1956), p. 189.

White House coverage for United Press (later named United Press International) during the Roosevelt administration. Smith said of the President's charm and crowd-rousing talents, "Franklin Roosevelt would have been a wonderful actor. He probably would have been a Shakespearean star. . . ."[58]

Roosevelt conducted most of his news conferences informally in the White House Oval Office, usually dressed in shirtsleeves. About 150 correspondents attended most meetings.[59] Radio correspondents attended the sessions, apparently only to take notes for later broadcast. When sections of the House and Senate galleries were opened to radio in 1939, the President granted them "the same privileges of reporting allowed newspaper correspondents." In fact, Roosevelt announced that "presidential press conferences" would be changed to "press and radio conferences," a term that was not to endure in common usage.[60] No evidence can be found of any radio broadcast of Roosevelt press conferences, although he did conduct radio interviews.[61] Television

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[58]Timothy G. Smith, ed., Merriman Smith's Book of Presidents, (New York, 1972), p. 22 and 30.

[59]New York Times, September 2, 1939, p. 8; March 14, 1938, p. 1.

[60]Ibid., May 2, 1939, p. 6; July 9, p. 19.

[61]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, p. 819.

transmission had been developed to an effective range of only about 50 miles by late 1939.[62]

Roosevelt sometimes relied on radio to go over the heads of newspapers. He innovated "fireside chats," described below, using them less frequently, however, than often assumed--his average was about three a year.[63] Roosevelt and radio teamed together to develop a new means of Presidential communication. In his first four years in office the President spoke on radio over 200 times. Most of those broadcasts were carried by 200 different stations throughout the country.[64] Mitchell Charnley, the Minnesota scholar who saw the possibilities of radio news, wrote:

> As 1933 came in, then, radio listeners heard full accounts of the attempt to assassinate President Roosevelt at Miami. The new President's inaugural on March 4 went out on a record-breaking international hookup. Eight days later Roosevelt initiated the 'fireside chat'--an event that was periodically to combine the President's striking 'radio personality' and exceedingly skillful scripts with whatever news he chose to present, all in a manner to build bigger and bigger radio audiences among a people desperate for relief from the depression.[65]

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[62] New York Times, September 1, 1939, p. 17.

[63] Phillips, "Radio and Television," p. 62.

[64] New York Times, March 7, 1937, Sect. XI, p. 12. He spoke on NBC 108 times and CBS 95 times during that period.

[65] Phillips, "Radio and Television," p. 61.

Roosevelt's unusual ability to monitor public opinion has been noted by several historians. He used an array that included the written media, letters, conversations, telegrams, an editorial digest, party reports and visits by political leaders.[66] His news conferences aided the process and he probably viewed them as another tool in his feedback apparatus. Arthur Krock noted that the Tuesday and Friday meetings with the press were held primarily for Roosevelt's "own end and not to account for his stewardship."[67] He also noted Roosevelt's use of press conferences for "dropping surprises," or trial-balloons, on the press. The President's decision to increase the membership of the Supreme Court was one such example.[68]

Roosevelt's skill in public relations in part came from the long tutelage of the consummate teacher in public relations, Louis McHenry Howe. A long-time friend and advisor to the President, Howe is described as giving the White House an intimate, relentless watch on public opinion; one whose major service was relentless criticism. Howe has been called the "no"

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[66]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, pp. 795-96.

[67]New York Times, December 21, 1944, p. 20; July 9, 1939, p. 19.

[68]Ibid., February 9, 1937, p. 4.

man from whom Roosevelt could never escape.[69]

Apparently, Roosevelt viewed news conferences as effective tools of foreign policy dissemination. He held one in the American Embassy in Buenos Aires in 1936 where 50 Argentine reporters attended. On another occasion he invited Uruguayan reporters aboard the USS Indianapolis for a news conference.[70]

Stephen T. Early, Roosevelt's press secretary, assisted the President throughout his 12 years in the White House. He sat behind Roosevelt during the news conferences and frequently advised the President regarding appropriate answers. Early was responsible for eliminating written questions. Early completely dropped the attribution of "White House spokesman" in his press briefings. He became, like his President, an identifiable source of news.[71]

During his Presidency, Roosevelt set precedent upon precedent for later news conferences. He invited groups other than the Washington press corps to his news conferences. One example was his press conference of December 27, 1935, when he spoke to a group of

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[69]Alfred B. Rollins, Jr., Roosevelt and Howe, (New York, 1962), pp. 452-53.

[70]New York Times, December 2, 1936, p. 1; December 4, p. 16.

[71]O'Donnell, "Stephen Tyree Early," p. 57 ff. and p. 167.

journalism teachers.[72] His were the first presidential news conferences to admit black reporters. Roosevelt published the first transcripts of news conferences, albeit well after the events.[73] He installed a radio broadcast studio in the White House, using it to supplement his press conference communication.[74]

As with other presidents, Franklin Roosevelt's relations with the press declined during his last years in office. Certainly the imposition of censorship during World War II was a factor, and his isolation from the press during his last months of declining health increased the problem. The New York Times, noting the relative paucity of news meetings in 1944, speculated on three occasions that Roosevelt's health was the prime reason. The Times also pointed out that his personal direction of war efforts and travel (newsmen were usually barred from traveling with the President for security reasons) had caused the decline.[75]

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[72]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, p. 783.

[73]New York Times, February 9, 1944, p. 21; March 14, 1938, p. 1. Transcripts of his March 1933 to March 1934 press conferences were released to the press in 1938.

[74]New York Times, July 30, 1933, Sect. IX, p. 7; Phillips, "Radio and Television," p. 67.

[75]Ibid., January 15, 1944, p. 15; January 31, p. 1; February 1, p. 18.

Roosevelt's span in office had an important influence on later presidential press conferences. In many respects his Presidency may be used as a prime measuring device for other presidential news conferences. In terms of style, frequency and effectiveness at communicating during periods of American crisis, Franklin Roosevelt was a rarity among presidents.

Arthur Krock compared President Truman's meetings with the press to those of Roosevelt early in 1945 and wrote that Truman's were more business-like. Krock noted they were "fact-filled," faster and more precise--leaving less need for questioning and probing than had Roosevelt's. Krock wrote that Truman waited until he had a "budget of important news to impart" before the President called a conference. As an example, Krock cited one 14-minute press conference containing about a dozen news articles--all important.[76]

Truman reduced the number of news conferences to one a week, with special conferences when he believed them appropriate. He also cut the length of press conferences, they were sometimes over in 10 or 12 minutes.[77]

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[76]Ibid., June 8, 1945, p. 18.

[77]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, p. 846.

Three hundred and forty-eight correspondents attended his first press conference and the meeting ended after about 20 minutes. Truman ushered in one of the chief news conference complaints of the 1970's: too many reporters, and too little time.[78]

For his comparable number of months in office, Truman held about half the number of press conferences that Roosevelt had held. Truman's total during his 93 months in office was 324 news conferences.[79]

The President allowed transcripts of the press meetings to be issued, but he retained control of his comments by requiring reporters to paraphrase most of his remarks. After his first Presidential misstatements, (their nature could not be determined in this research) it was suggested that Truman return to the custom of using written questions--at least for certain sensitive topics such as international affairs--a suggestion Truman rejected.[80]

Probably because of the increasing number of reporters attending news conferences (questioners could not always be identified, nor questions clearly heard in the crowded office) Truman moved the location of the

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[78] Ibid., p. 847.

[79] Small, Political Power and the Press, p. 86.

[80] New York Times, October 25, 1946, p. 22.

meetings from the Presidential Office to the Indian Treaty Room in the Executive Office Building.[81] The move gave reporters the chance to sit down and take notes during press conferences, and eliminated one cause of complaint during the Roosevelt administration.[82]

Other innovations required the reporters to identify themselves before each question, causing what was criticized as a "yo-yo" effect as they stood up and sat down.[83]

Another major step in his Presidential press conferences was the use of television film. Television reporters narrated the substance of Truman's remarks over silent film of the meetings.[84]

When the conferences were moved from the White House, Presidential Press Secretary Joseph Short arranged to have tape recordings made of the meetings. The arrangement improved the long-standing problem faced by reporters of waiting hours or days for a typed transcript. At the ends of the sessions

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[81] Ibid., March 3, 1950, p. 18.

[82] Morgan, et al., Presidency and the Press Conference, p. 48.

[83] Ibid., p. 16.

[84] Small, Political Power and the Press, p. 87.

questioned statements were played back for clarification.[85] Elaborate U.S. Army Signal Corps equipment was installed in the Indian Treaty Room to replace a standard office dictating machine. In July 1951, Congressional Democratic leaders were offered copies of press conference transcripts. When the offer was accepted, there was little advantage in keeping transcripts under control of the White House any longer. With the recordings, it was a short step to releasing portions of them for radio broadcast. For the first time entire sentences and paragraphs of presidential press conferences were released, and actualities of the meetings were used on radio newscasts.[86]

Television became a reality of presidential "live" communication in October 1947. A broadcast by the President appealing for public cooperation in a conservation program marked the first time television was used for a broadcast from the White House.[87]

Truman was a less successful speaker than Roosevelt and television came to his aid. One writer, Ben Gross,

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[85] New York Times, October 14, 1951, Sect. VI, p. 62.

[86] Ibid.; Cornwell, Presidential Leadership, p. 174.

[87] Phillips, "Radio and Television," p. 76.

was to say:

> The Missourian lacks polish; his delivery is pedestrian; his voice, at best, only average, and the content of his addresses devoid of those flashes of eloquences which mark the truly distinguished speaker. All of these defects were highlighted on radio. In fact, it is safe to say that, without television, Truman might have been remembered as one of our duller political spellbinders. But with the camera added to the microphone, his speeches gained not only the added dimension of sight but also the important one of person-to-person appeal.88

Although television helped Truman, he used it very little in comparison to his successors. He generally relied on radio to communicate with the people.[89] Truman's use of radio was probably influenced by the Federal Communications Commission's TV "freeze" which lasted officially from September 1948 until April 14, 1952. The first television construction permits after the "thaw," however, were not issued until February 1953. That month 70 licenses were approved, over a 700 per cent increase above the 1948 FCC allowances.[90]

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[88] Ibid.,p. 73.

[89] Afton S. Auld, "Television and Presidential Politics, 1952-1970," M.A. Thesis, University of Kansas, 1970, p. 2. Hereafter cited as Auld, "Television and Politics."

[90] Radio and Television News, August 1952, p. 10; February 1953, p. 70.

As was the case with most other presidents, Truman's press conferences diminished in number during his last year in office. Three were cancelled in June and July, 1952, for excuses ranging from the heat to Presidential illness. There was a two-month gap between late September and mid-November that year. Although the excuses varied, Truman's impending departure from office was probably the reason underlying the reduction in meetings with the press. The outgoing President no longer needed the press to accomplish his objectives.

In his final Presidential press conference, on January 15, 1953, Truman summarized his views and uses of press conferences:

> . . .I want to make it plain that I think it is important for our democratic system of government that every medium of communication between the citizens and their government, particularly the President, be kept open as far as possible..
>
> This kind of news conference where reporters can ask any question they can dream up--directly to the President of the United States--illustrates how strong and how vital our democracy is. There is no other country in the world where the chief of state submits to such unlimited questioning. . . .
>
> I hope [succeeding Presidents] will never cut out the direct line of communication between themselves and the people.91

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[91]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, Truman to Johnson, pp. 57-58.

Elmer Cornwell, Jr. put Truman Presidential press conferences in perspective:

> Though all of [his] changes seem, individually, of minor consequence, their cumulative impact was considerable. By the time President Truman left office the highly informal, personalized, almost casual press conference of the past had become an increasingly routinized, institutionalized part of the presidential communications apparatus. Preparation became elaborately formalized, as did the conduct of the meetings themselves in their new setting, with a growing array of electronic aids. Finally, the nature of the meetings as private encounters between the Chief Executive and the newspaper representatives was rapidly changing into a semi-public performance (soon to become completely public) whose transactions were increasingly part of the public record.92

With only minor variations, Presidential press conferences as known in the 1970's originated during the Eisenhower administration. During the President's news conference on December 16, 1953--the first Presidential news conference to be recorded on tape for radio broadcast in entirety--Eisenhower announced the policy of allowing reporters to quote him directly, without limitation.[93]

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[92]Cornwell, Presidential Leadership, pp. 174-75.

[93]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, Truman to Johnson, p. 69.

James Hagerty, presidential press secretary through both terms of the Eisenhower administration, was the innovator freeing newspapers from presidential paraphrase.[94] The New York Times began printing verbatim transcripts of the sessions regularly. The step forward in publicizing meetings with the Fourth Estate during Hagerty's tenure as presidential press secretary was a great one, and he was described by one historian as a greater policy maker than any other press secretary.[95]

On January 19, 1955, President Eisenhower held the first press conference in which television and newsreel cameramen were allowed to make sound movies.[96] A fast film had been developed that could be used in the Indian Treaty Room without a large array of bright, hot lights.[97] A month later the first complete TV film of a presidential press conference was released. In May 1955, at a "TV pioneer dinner" hosted by Sponsor Magazine given in his honor for the work he had

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[94]Gordon A. Moon II, "James Campbell Hagerty's Eight Years in the White House." M.A. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1962, pp. 64-65. Hereafter cited as Moon, "James Campbell Hagerty."

[95]Ibid., p. 146.

[96]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, Truman to Johnson, p. 77.

[97]Dunn, "Presidential Press Conference," p. 11.

done in arranging the showing of Presidential press conferences, James Hagerty predicted color TV at future news meetings.[98]

For some critics, TV was seen as a debasement of the meetings as a profitable mode of communicating with a president. Assuming a reporter could get himself recognized, his question and Eisenhower's answer were now formally transcribed, recorded, taped and filmed. Almost before he could file his copy, both the newsman and the President were being viewed in living rooms across America.

Protagonists of the filming disagreed. They viewed the newspaperman's loss as a public information gain. They noted the effect of television in improving communication between the government and the people. The presidential press conference was never meant to be a special preserve for reporters, they pointed out.[99]

President Eisenhower agreed with the point when he expressed his views on the conferences in an interview after leaving office:

> Now, let's remember this: The [sic] press conference is not for the benefit of the

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[98]New York Times, February 24, 1955, p. 14; May 23, p. 47.

[99]Dunn, "Presidential Press Conference," p. 11.

> press and the newsman himself; it is for the public, and when the President feels that it is time to deliver some message this is a good way to do it. . . .I don't think I would change the format too much from what we had. Sometimes I was quite regular about holding them, sometimes I wasn't. I sometimes omitted them because I saw nothing new on the horizon. Some writers tried to make it look like I hated these conferences and so on. This is far from the truth.100

In a decade, the presidential press conference had made an evolution from informal shirtsleeve gatherings of reporters around a president's desk to formal electronic newscasts with an audience of millions.

Thus, Eisenhower's Presidency marked the beginning of the era of television in the White House. When the first televised press conference was recorded with sound on film, Presidential Press Secretary James Hagerty announced that the White House reserved the right to edit the film. The option was seldom exercised, but the policy that the spoken word of the President remained under the control of the White House was continued.[101]

With the advent of television, however, the number of Presidential press conferences further diminished.

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[100] Ibid., p. 12.

[101] Small, Political Power and the Press, pp. 93-96.

President Eisenhower held about 190 press conferences during his 96 months in office, about one-half the number President Truman had held during a similar period of time.[102]

Minor Eisenhower innovations included changing the press conferences from Thursdays to Wednesdays; air-conditioning the press conference meeting room--a plea of reporters dating back to the Truman administration; broadcasting, via Voice of America, the first Russian translation of portions of an American presidential press conference and the appointment of the first woman associate presidential press secretary, Mrs. Anne Williams Wheaton, who replaced Murray Snyder.[103]

Contrary to belief among some historians, President Eisenhower--rather than President Kennedy--held the first Presidential press conference to be broadcast on live TV. The broadcast occurred from the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco during the Republican National Convention in 1956. Eisenhower announced that

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[102]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, Truman to Johnson, p. 87.

[103]New York Times, June 4, 1953, p. 25; August 3, 1959, p. 12; September 29, 1959, p. 16; April 4, 1957, p. 1.

Richard Nixon would be kept on the Republican ticket as Vice-Presidential candidate despite a serious effort, backed principally by Harold E. Stassen, to replace Nixon with another candidate.[104]

During a meeting with the press on March 15, 1956 the President noted his use of press conferences on two occasions, once by responding to a question that took him by surprise, saying, ". . .you know, every morning over here I learn something." Moments later he added:

> . . .I rather like to get. . .questions because frequently I think they represent the kind of thinking that is going on. . . . [Reporter's] opinions. . .have some value. . . in any democratic government.105

Eisenhower noted that the sessions caused him to spend time reviewing his decisions and policies. Each morning before a press conference, Eisenhower was briefed on answers to anticipated reporter's questions by representatives of the State Department, the C I A, his military staff secretary and his press secretary. Depending on expected questions other key staff members or experts in a particular field were invited.[106]

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[104] Ibid., August 23, 1956, p. 12; p. 53.

[105] Ibid., March 15, 1956, p. 22.

[106] Robert L. Branyan and Lawrence H. Larsen, eds., The Eisenhower Administration, 1953-1961, (New York, 1971), pp. 59-62.

While Eisenhower has been described as never knowing reporters and being ". . .suspicious, and never fully trusting them," President Kennedy was the opposite.[107]

President-elect John Fitzgerald Kennedy took the advice of his soon-to-be press secretary, Pierre Salinger, and introduced live television at Presidential news conferences on a regular basis.[108] Though Kennedy was the third President of the television age, the decision was not an easy one. It represented a radical departure from press conference tradition. Until Kennedy, modern American presidents had all insisted on at least a minimum of censorship of their press conferences. Roosevelt and Truman, save for specific permission, would not let the press quote them directly. Eisenhower, through Hagerty, allowed the first use of exact quotes in transcripts and on film and tape, but still maintained editing rights--though seldom exercising them.

Hagerty's thin margin for Presidential disclaimer was erased, however, at President Kennedy's first press conference on January 25, 1961. Arguments against the move were voiced by both the press (Merriman Smith

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[107] Small, Political Power and the Press, p. 96.

[108] Ibid.

[UPI], Edward Folliard [Washington Post], Robert Donovan [New York Herold Tribune] and Raymond Brandt [St. Louis Post Dispatch]) and Presidential advisers (McGeorge Bundy, Ted Sorensen and Dean Rusk). Primary opposition came in the form of arguments aimed at possible Presidential "fluffs" or slips in sensitive foreign policy subjects; that live conferences would place newspapers at a deadline disadvantage or become "sideshows;" that using newspaper people as "props" would prohibit necessary depth questioning.[109]

Kennedy's first press conference was also different in another respect. The President moved it to the State Department Auditorium to accommodate growing media attendance. The auditorium was new and specially designed for TV.[110]

As a rule the press conference technique met with approval. Though conducted at an off-viewing hour, 6 p.m. (EST) the seven-city Arbitron ratings--CBS - 12.8; NBC - 12.3; ABC - 8.2--were high for the time spot.[111]

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[109] Pierre Salinger, With Kennedy, (Garden City, New York, 1966), pp. 54-58

[110] Dunn, "Presidential Press Conference," p. 14; Auld, "Television and Politics," pp. 51-52.

[111] Ibid., Auld.

Newsweek was critical of the conference, however:

> Standing between the flags of the U.S. and the Presidency, the tips of his fingers stroking the sides of the walnut lecturn before him, Mr. Kennedy seemed remote from the newsmen on the floor. As Peter Lisagor, Washington bureau chief of The Chicago Daily News, put it later: 'When I got up to ask a question, I felt like I was addressing the United Nations Assembly.'[112]

Thus, bringing the public closer to the President, in what Salinger viewed as a Roosevelt tactic of taking a case directly to the people--as in a "fireside chat"[113] actually tended to make the President remote from the press. More reporters attended the conferences and clamor for Presidential recognition grew among questioners. The long-standing intimacy between president and press had been diluted by distance in the new State Department environment.[114]

The changes brought other ground rules. Reporters, unlike in the past, could not leave the conferences until they were over. Truman's policy of making correspondents identify themselves and their affiliation, used to facilitate counterattacks on anonymous reporters

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[112] Ibid.

[113] Salinger, With Kennedy, p. 56.

[114] Auld, "Television and Politics," p. 53.

with "hot" questions from the protection of the back of the room, was dropped. Salinger was fearful that reporters would use the unedited meetings to "plug" the newspapers they represented, a ploy of Sarah McClendon during Eisenhower press conferences.[115]

That first press conference was attended by over 400 reporters and viewed by an estimated 65 million Americans. Merriman Smith recalled that reporters took relatively few notes during the meeting. The transcript system had become efficient to the extent of completing the first five or six pages of the transcript by the time "Thank you, Mr. President" ended the conference. The recording system for the room included "shot gun" microphones that zoomed from row to row as reporters stood to ask questions.[116]

The President's news conferences became truly public performances and as such could no longer serve as semi-confidential briefings for the press.

David Halberstam has said that not only were live televised press conferences good for Kennedy (and bad for Congress, the Courts, and the Republican Party),

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[115]Salinger, With Kennedy, pp. 57-59.

[116]Dunn, "Presidential Press Conference," pp. 14-15.

they were good for television, making it more in demand. Halberstam said:

> Kennedy's Presidency helped change the entire balance of American politics. By the time he left office, the Presidency, in large part because of television, in part because of his own style, had come to play a dominant role in American life; he and the men around him began to take on the roles previously relegated to Hollywood stars. . . .[117]

The Bay of Pigs incident, according to William J. Small, one-time CBS Washington News Bureau manager, may have marked the end of any Kennedy-press "honeymoon."[118]

"News management" became a term associated with the Kennedy administration. Arthur Krock said in March 1963, that he found the administration guilty of a news management policy ". . .enforced more cynically and boldly than by any previous Administration in a period when the United States was not at war." Krock defined news management as suppression, concealment, distortion, false weighting of the facts, threats, shutting off sources, and even the "off-the-record" device which operates ". . .without the imprint of

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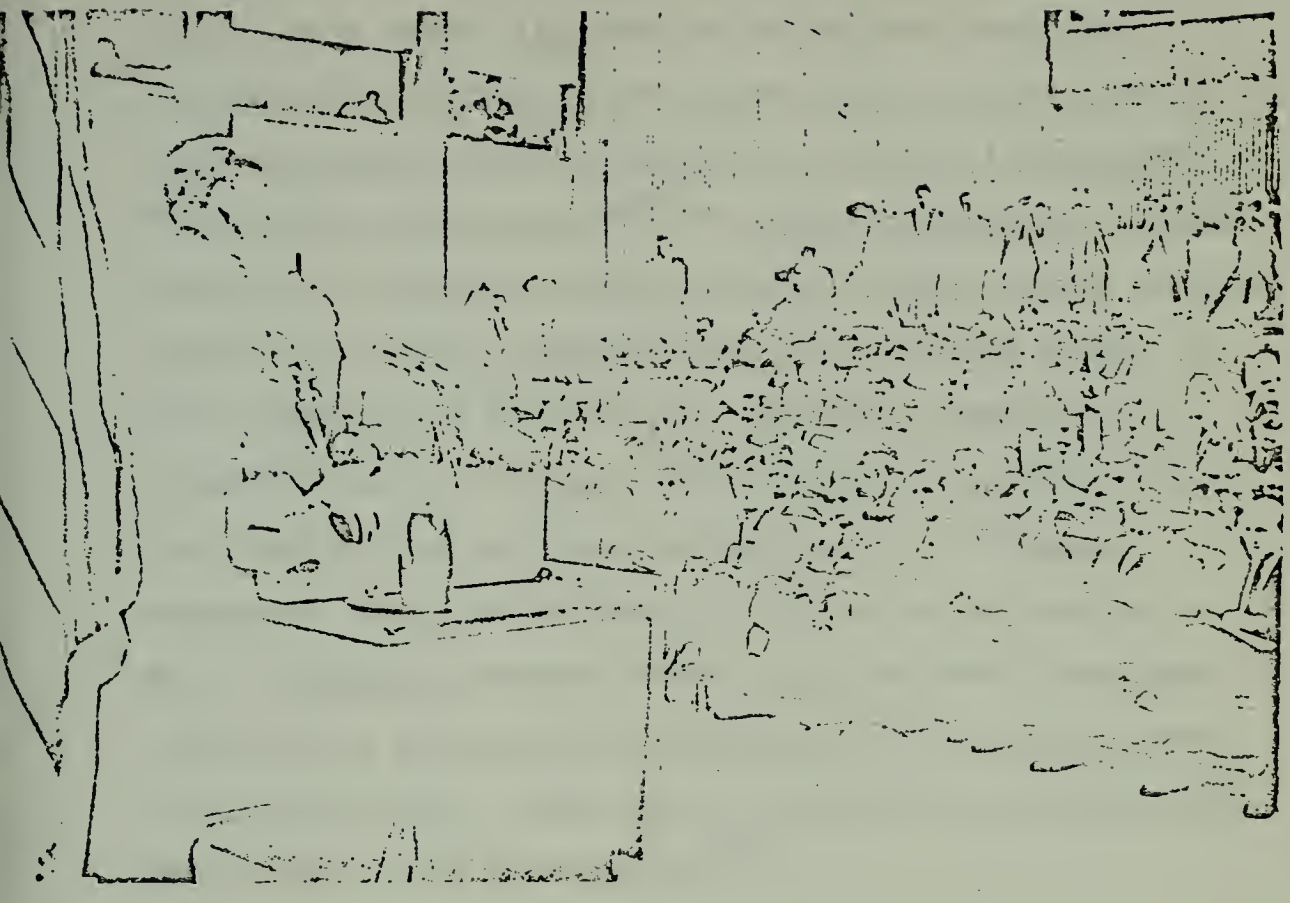
[117]David Halberstam, "Press and Prejudice," Esquire, April 1974, p. 113.

[118]Small, Political Power and the Press, p. 104.



Extra space in the State Department auditorium plus the reduced pressure to take notes encouraged a seating pattern that divided the [Kennedy] assemblage roughly into three groups. Reporters who seriously intended to ask questions were either White House press corps "regulars" with assigned seats in the front row or others who found space in the first three rows. Reporters who came largely to observe took seats in the next four or five rows, and behind them sat the nonjournalistic visitors. The progressively relaxed rules for admitting the latter underscored the increasingly public nature of the conference.[119]

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[119]Dunn, "Presidential Press Conference," p. 16.

authority and responsibility, and is open to repudiation by its very source if repudiation becomes expedient." The two-time Pulitzer prize winner noted the concept of news management could be traced to President Harding's "White House spokesman."[120] The "news management" phrase, however, was used as early as 1963 by James Reston when he testified before a congressional subcommittee headed by Rep. John Moss of California. The Moss Committee was investigating the Kennedy administration's handling of the press during the Cuban missile crisis.[121] News management came in for heavy criticism by the media. A poll of Newsweek newsmen showed they believed there was greater news management by Kennedy than his predecessor but, surprisingly, that access to news was more available from Kennedy than Eisenhower.[122]

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[120]Arthur Krock, "Mr. Kennedy's Management of the News," Fortune, March 1963, p. 82 ff.

[121]Small, Political Power and the Press, p. 104; 390.

[122]Phillips, "Radio and Television,"; "How Much Management of the News?,"; Newsweek, April 8, 1963, p. 59:

1. Do you believe the Kennedy Administration engages in practices that could be called "news management?"
   Yes: 40 -- No: 3
2. Do you believe the Eisenhower Administration engaged in similar practices?
   Yes: 40 -- No: 3
3. Do you have more, or less, access to news sources in the Kennedy Administration than you had in the Eisenhower Administration?
   More: 31 -- Less: 4 -- Same: 8

As suspicions of management of the news grew, the number of presidential press conferences diminished. During his 34 months in office, President Kennedy held 63 press conferences, less than the average number held by Eisenhower for a comparable time in office.[123]

As noted, Kennedy viewed press conferences as televised "fireside chats." He probably viewed them, in conjunction with his extensive reading habit, as a form of feedback. Salinger notes in his book that Kennedy "scanned, regularly" 12 newspapers (none from the West Coast) and 12 magazines.[124] Robert Kintner said that Kennedy was ". . .immensely conscious of the significance of television. Whenever he appeared on the screen, he wanted to know what his ratings were."[125] Kennedy also hosted luncheons with editors and publishers from various states to discuss "mutual problems and matters of public concern." He is reported

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4. Which Administration worked harder at it?
   Kennedy: 29 -- Eisenhower: 6 -- Same: 3
5. If both did, which was more successful?
   Kennedy: 18 -- Eisenhower: 17

[123]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, Truman to Johnson, p. 105.

[124]Salinger, With Kennedy, p. 117.

[125]Phillips, "Radio and Television," p. 106.

to have viewed the Fourth Estate as a properly critical branch of government.[126]

Late in 1962 President Kennedy allowed a televised interview with representatives of the three networks. The broadcast was taped in his office and set another precedent for his successors.[127] Kennedy viewed interviews as expansions of press conferences, a belief properly criticized by Arthur Krock.[128]

There were other innovations and modern precedents, some major, others not, set by President Kennedy. The Telstar communications satellite broadcast the first "live" American presidential press conference to Europe. Kennedy introduced visual aides at his conferences such as charts and maps, giving the meetings the appearances of briefings and began to alter press conference times of day to permit equal deadline treatment for morning and evening newspapers.[129]

President Kennedy's assassination cut short other possible developments in press conferences, leaving speculation to historians willing to face "what if"-type questions of the past. Kennedy may have extended

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[126]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, Truman to Johnson, pp. 95-96.

[127]Phillips, "Radio and Television," p. 107.

[128]New York Times, September 5, 1963, p. 30.

[129]Ibid., July 18, 1962, p. 6; March 24, 1961, p. 1; November 12, 1963, p. 24.

the use of his press conferences to a foreign policy impact far beyond Telstar had he lived. He had granted successful interviews with the editor of Izvestia[130] and one wonders if he was not on the verge of using Franklin Roosevelt-like news conferences in an age of international satellite communications.

As it is, Kennedy's administration will be noted for bringing televised press meetings to maturity and for eliminating any form of presidential censorship from presidential press conferences.

President Lyndon Baines Johnson has been accused of trying to turn the presidential press conference "clock back to Truman."[131] The generalization, based on Johnson's failure to use formal televised press conferences in the Kennedy tradition or to provide an environment for a verbatim transcript as had Eisenhower, is tempting to accept.

While technical innovations in press conferences were many--though largely minor--the President experimented with such varied formats that make categorization difficult.

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[130] Ibid., November 29, 1961, p. 1.

[131] Rowland Evans Jr. and Robert D. Novak, Lyndon B. Johnson: The Exercise of Power, (New York, 1966), p. 423.

Press conference locations were changed at the whim of the President, ranging from the front porch of his ranch or the White House Rose Garden to his White House Office or the World's Fair Pavilion, and even to 17-lap walks around the White House lawn. They variously included correspondents' wives and children and hay-bale rostrums.[132]

After a trial-and-error period, the conferences were taken to the White House Theater where some technical changes were introduced. Johnson employed a television prompting device for his opening statements, or "voluntaries," which were known to range up to 20 minutes; he used improved lighting equipment and reflector devices to aid television cameras and in 1967 he conducted the first live televised presidential press conference in color.[133]

James E. Pollard lists other differences in the Lyndon Johnson press conferences from those of his predecessor. Johnson was more "folksy" than Kennedy, was more informal, and impromptu news conferences became the new Presidential rule. The informal conference

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[132]New York Times, April 28, 1965, p. 17.

[133]Ibid., July 14, 1965, p. 20; April 28, 1965, p. 17; July 29, 1965, p. 12; August 26, 1965, p. 37; March 10, 1967, p. 19.

technique tended to limit the meetings to the regular White House press corps, a group more dependent on a president for news than outside reporters, and thus more obligated to maintaining friendly press relations with the White House. Johnson press conferences were more frequent--26 in the first 182 days of office--but were given on shorter notice.[134] During his five years as President, Lyndon Johnson held 126 news conferences.[135]

One of Johnson's press secretaries, George Reedy, described him as "dreading" televised news conferences, but indicated that Johnson left each televised session with an improved "public image."[136]

Reedy also noted a technical innovation in the presidential press conference of having the White House staffed with "warm" TV cameras standing by during the working day to allow the President to appear instantly on camera.[137] Johnson also introduced the use of a lapel microphone, giving him greater mobility than past

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[134]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, Truman to Johnson, p. 113.

[135]David Wise, The Politics of Lying, (New York, 1973), p. 359.

[136]Reedy, Twilight of the Presidency, p. 163.

[137]Ibid., p. 104.

TV-era presidents.[138]

Reedy described other mechanics of late 1960's press conferences:

> On either side of the president [sic] (but out of the lens angles) are signal corps men with 'shotgun' microphones which they point at each correspondent who is recognized. Overhead is a rack designed to give him precisely the lighting he wants. The microphone into which he speaks is fed into a "mult"--a device which permits all the networks to pick up his voice without the necessity of mounting a microphone on the podium--which is also controlled by the signal corps.139

One historian notes an early Johnson tendency to overuse the media and appear to say nothing, followed by a later habit of greater restraint in the use of the media, especially television.[140] Tom Wicker in a New York Times column agreed, drawing a comparison between Johnson and Kennedy in their restraint shown toward formal televised press conferences especially during times of "diplomatic intricacies and political pressures."[141]

Johnson difficulties with press conferences,

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[138]McGuire, "Democracy's Confrontation," p. 38.

[139]Reedy, Twilight of the Presidency, p. 163.

[140]Phillips, "Radio and Television," p. 135.

[141]New York Times, April 28, 1965, p. 17.

beyond lacking the showmanship qualities of Kennedy before large groups, probably were the result of his other press problems. Johnson's habit of playing favorites with certain reporters, his failure to continue the once-criticized Kennedy-type conferences on a regular basis, and his reputed "thin skin" about media criticism all were minor contributers. A major contributer was the "credibility gap."[142]

While Kennedy and Eisenhower were accused of "news management," Johnson was accused of creating a "credibility gap," again suggesting the White House was not to be believed. At the end of Johnson's term in office, the professional journalism society, Sigma Delta Chi, said:

> The Credibility Gap, which has reached awesome proportions under the Johnson Administration, continued to be a grave handicap. Secrecy, lies, half-truths, deception--this was the daily fare.

The report concluded that Johnson had the worst record of credibility of any president in the history of the country up to that time.[143]

Clarification of terms is needed here. The phrase

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[142] Auld, "Television and Politics," pp. 62-79.

[143] Small, Political Power and the Press, pp. 117-119.

"credibility gap" is an etymological descendant of Eisenhower's "missile gap" of the late 1950's. David Wise is credited with creating the "credibility gap" term in May 1965, in a story for the New York Herald Tribune. The words "credibility" and "gap," though separate in the story were placed together by a headline writer who put them in quotes. Later that year the Washington Post helped popularize the phrase.[144]

Growing dissent over civil rights and the Vietnam War were other problems relating to Johnson's press relations and his news conferences. By the spring of 1968 public opinion turned against his policies. The rage and storm of dissidents reached the White House gates and eventually even made most Presidential travel unsafe. Johnson became ever more isolated from contact with reality beyond his secure sanctuaries.[145]

Although Johnson was accessible to small groups of reporters, or individual journalists, he avoided large press conferences. Richard Strout of The Christian Science Monitor, a veteran Washington correspondent whose reporting dated to the Harding Presidency, summarized the Johnson predicament with news conferences:

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[144]Wise, Politics of Lying, p. 32.

[145]Phillips, "Radio and Television," p. 135; Reedy, Twilight of the Presidency, p. 95.

> The presidential press conference itself is very much what the President makes it. It is an honorable, a salutary, and I think, a necessary adjunct to our government, and I do not like to see our profession let it wither on the vine without a protest. . . .
>
> Let me make it clear that when I refer to a press conference I mean one announced in advance and held in Washington. I do not mean a sudden spur-of-the moment affair, nor yet an ambulatory conference where the President strides around the flower beds and the puffing press pursues him.
>
> President Johnson has been one of the most accessible men to the press of any President; that is in informal gatherings, meetings with individual bureau chiefs, or tips to favorite correspondents. But as for formal press conferences, I can only figure that he had nine last year. So far in 1966 he has held only a few.
>
> When a modern President foregoes the regular press conference--and I acknowledge that it has many faults and is time consuming and even irksome--you are apt to get a substitute: government by leak, seepage, or let me call it news-ooze. . .[this] may be successful for awhile, but in time it produces, I believe, a credibility gap, the kind of gap which some think they see at present. . . .
>
> The normal discipline of a formal press conference [would be] a perfect tool for him to fill the credibility gap, if he were prepared to use it.[146]

One-time press secretary to Johnson, George E. Christian, came to somewhat the same conclusion:

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[146]Dunn, "Presidential Press Conference," p. 19.

> Our. . .major problem involved frequency of formal news conferences. Television and radio wanted more of them, President Johnson did not like the format, and many White House regulars believed that the less formal office conferences, with the opportunity for follow-up questions, were much more informative.147

In retrospect, President Johnson did little to advance presidential press conferences. One may philosophize that little was left to be done with them in terms of format or technical advances. That, of course, remains a mere speculation.

After leaving office Lyndon Johnson admitted his apprehensive view of large televised news conferences was a major shortcoming:

> . . .I believe I should have held more regular televised news conferences. I was always more comfortable meeting with reporters around my desk, as President Roosevelt did, because it often gave us an opportunity to explore questions in greater depth than in a televised spectacular. Yet broadcast news conferences are an effective means of communicating with the public and should be widely used by national leaders.148

Over a period of about a half century presidential press conferences were transformed from highly controlled

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147George E. Christian, Letter to Author, October 28, 1974.

148Ray Scherer, "The President's Powerful Persuader--Television," T.V. Guide, May 3, 1969, p. 10.

and protective instruments of presidential communication to live, color, prime time television close-ups that allowed most Americans intimate views of their presidents--and their president's ideas. As electronic media developed presidential press conferences diminished. Mass communication, ironically, tended to isolate presidential communicators from their audiences.

As the period of mature presidential electronic communication extended itself, the two-way communication of news conferences generally gave way to more controllable one-way transmissions such as presidential speeches and statements as Table I shows.

The notable exception to the trend in Table I, President Johnson, may be partially explained by the security constraints in the last years of his Presidency, when militant protesters made even his speeches a relative rarity.

As one might expect, radio usage, by itself, during the same period tended to wane as television became a preferred mode of communication. Table II depicts the trend.

Each president's views of the conferences had shaped his uses of them. Each had problems with them. In less than a lifetime presidential press conferences had developed along with the media and presidential philosophies of public communication to a paradoxical

TABLE I

PRESIDENTIAL PRESS CONFERENCES
AND PRESIDENTIAL SPEECHES

President	Speech Yearly Average [a]	Press Conference - Speech Ratio
Truman	58	1 : 1.4
Eisenhower	73	1 : 3.4
Kennedy	113	1 : 5.4
Johnson	60	1 : 2.6

[a] Includes speeches, addresses, announcements and statements whose texts are recorded in the New York Times. Does not include presidential press conferences, wires, letters, messages, declarations, communiques, citations, toasts, reports, memos or orders. Categories such as pleas or comments were included in the tabulation when the circumstances indicated they resembled a speech.

TABLE II

TOTAL PRESIDENTIAL USES OF RADIO AND TV FOR SPEECHES

President	Radio	TV	Both	Total
Truman	28	1	8	37
Eisenhower	9	25	42	76
Kennedy	0	4	9	13
Johnson	2	17	3	22

SOURCE: New York Times Index, passim.

vanishing point. Their electronic improvement and presidential hesitation to use them began to appear to be their demise.

During its sixty-odd year span, the presidential press conference tended to diminish in use near the end of scheduled presidential terms. With only few exceptions--Coolidge chief among them--presidents tended to neglect press meetings after passing the midpoint in their second term. Presidents traditionally held press conferences to accomplish their objectives and as their tenure in office waned they tended to use them less frequently.

Space precludes analysis of press conference usage in latter parts of presidential second terms, but it may be generalized that a president's maintenance of a steady press conference schedule is some indicator of his public standing. Herbert Hoover and Lyndon Johnson are extreme examples of Presidents who shunned the give-and-take of news conferences as public opinion turned against them in the final years of their administrations.

The most extreme example of press conference isolation to date, however, may be seen in the final Presidential years of Richard Nixon.

CHAPTER II

RICHARD MILHOUS NIXON AND THE PRESS CONFERENCE: AN OVERVIEW

> The imperfection of the news conference vehicle is an excuse for not having more, but it is not a valid excuse.
>
> --Edward P. Morgan
> November 1971

President Nixon cut himself off from what George Reedy described as the most effective instrument of communication to keep a president in touch with reality.

This chapter will discuss the overall uses of the Nixon Presidential press conference and highlight some of the early influences that may have contributed to Nixon's infrequent and sometimes abrasive sessions with the media.

Were numbers alone a sign of "killing off" the presidential press conference, President Nixon would have been found guilty. He called fewer Presidential press conferences, on a yearly average, than any president since Calvin Coolidge as Table III shows.

Moreover, the generalization of Nixon's down-grading the presidential press conference can be extended to his reduction of televised press conferences

TABLE III

PRESIDENTIAL NEWS CONFERENCE FREQUENCY

President	#Press Confs	Years in Office	Yearly Average
Wilson	unclear	8	unclear
Harding	unclear[a]	2	64[b]
Coolidge	520	6	87
Hoover	66	4	17
Roosevelt	998	12	81
Truman	324	8	42
Eisenhower	190	8	24
Kennedy	64	3	21
Johnson	126	5	23
Nixon	42[c]	6	7

SOURCE: For Coolidge see Small, Political Power and the Press, p. 82. For Hoover see Pollard, The Presidents and the Press, p. 741. For Roosevelt through Truman see Pollard, The Presidents and the Press, Truman Through Johnson, p. 87. For Eisenhower through Johnson see Wise, The Politics of Lying, p. 457.

[a]Sixteen press conferences have been found in the first three months in office.

[b]Approximation.

[c]Appendix B lists Nixon's Presidential press conferences.

as a channel of communication with the public between 1969 and 1973. Until late 1973, when Watergate pressures were clearly reaching Presidential level, the use of televised press conferences was cut yearly, as Table IV shows.

Though frugal with televised press conferences, Nixon was accurately referred to, by one historian, as "the supreme prime-time President." In his first year and a half he was on prime time, for speeches and announcements, more than Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson combined in their first eighteen months.[1] Television exposure, however, does not equal political success.

During his Presidency, Nixon maintained a ratio of one press conference for each 4.3 speeches, a communication imbalance surpassed only by President Kennedy as seen in Table I.

Nixon's uses of Presidential news conferences may be categorized in two periods, both fraught with problems.

First, the period between 1969 and 1973 when televised conferences were reduced in number. Efforts were made during that interval to use more controlled and smaller "pseudo" news conferences or "conversations" to replace the accepted format of the conventional

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[1]Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Imperial Presidency, (Boston, 1973), p. 226.

TABLE IV

PRESIDENT NIXON'S USE OF TELEVISED PRESS CONFERENCES

Year	Press Conferences	Televised
1969	9	8
1970	6	4
1971	9	4
1972	7	2
1973	8	3[a]
1974	3	3

SOURCE: For years 1969 to 1972 see Wise, The Politics of Lying, p. 457.

[a]The conferences took place during September, October and November, 1973.

meetings with the press. Group and individual interviews, such as the Dan Rather (CBS), Barbara Walters (NBC), Howard K. Smith (ABC) and Daniel Schorr (CBS) "one-on-one" interviews during 1971,[2] and television interviews with three to six member media groups in July, 1970, and January and April, 1971,[3] were used perhaps in response to press questions of infrequency of news conferences and Presidential isolation.[4] As will be seen frequently in later chapters, Nixon viewed those "conversations" as acceptable communication tools he could use in conjunction with presidential news conferences. During that first period Nixon also made brief use of "limited" press conferences. In February and May 1971 and in June 1972 he limited the news sessions either by subject or the number of reporters that could attend. Both his "conversations" and "limited" press conferences were probably efforts to replace or improve his infrequent news sessions.

Second, during late 1973 and early 1974, the Presidential response was to resort to "softer," more

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[2]Wise, Politics of Lying, pp. 74; 275 and 339-40.

[3]New York Times, July 2, 1970, p. 10; January 5, 1971, pp. 20-21; April 17, 1971, p. 14; May 2, 1971, p. 66.

[4]Ibid., July 21, 1970, p. 16.

sympathetic audiences when the Watergate scandal was reaching crisis-like proportions. The partisan press conferences of that period may have been a maneuver to go directly to the people to answer an increasing number of press questions concerning Watergate and Presidential isolation and/or to dispel the idea that the presidential press conference was being avoided. Using a "staged" press conference before a partisan audience, where the questions were expected to be soft, caused the meetings to be more a publicity tool than a source of feedback for the President during a time when facts were most needed.[5] They were attempts at going directly to the people over the heads of the media in the guise of press conferences.

The Presidential responses, first toward panel and individual interviews, and later toward "staged" news conferences, were detected--and criticized--by the press as "nonpress conferences."[6]

At this point a potential historical morass--over-reliance on causality--must be pointed out. Nixon's uses of press conferences, categorized above, are of course the result of a great number of influences.

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[5]Ibid., March 25, 1974, p. 17.

[6]"The Nonpress Conference," Broadcasting, April 8, 1974, p. 74.

Surely an important one not discussed here, and perhaps the basis for another study, is his psychological make-up. Press conferences are, after all, what individual presidential personalities make them. The causes listed below, therefore, cannot be all-inclusive. They are used to paint at least some part of the milieu found in the background of Richard Nixon's avoidanoe of Presidential news conferences.

One cause of Nixon's seldom using press conferences, applicable to most presidents since Woodrow Wilson, may be attributed to the adversary relationship that Daniel P. Moynihan has detected between presidents and the press. Moynihan contends that some of the reasons for poor press relations are the adversary culture that has grown from the American muckraking journalism tradition; the effects of the liberal Washington and New York presses; media reliance in recent years on leaks from bureaucracies wanting to get their side of the story to the press, and a failure on the part of the press to correct its own mistakes.[7]

Another cause for the decrease in presidential news conferences, at least since the Truman administration, may be found in technological advances in communications that carry the presidential statement to the nation and

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[7]Washington Post, March 14, 1971, Sect. D, p. 1.

and the world in seconds. As radio and TV have developed in an age of "big governments" and nuclear warheads the complex tasks normally delegated to governmental staff officers may have become too complicated for impromptu off-the-cuff explanation by a president in a press conference. As shown in the last chapter more controlled forms of presidential communication have generally increased, perhaps at the expense of press conferences, as radio and TV developed.

In the case of Nixon, however, one unique cause for neglecting the press sessions was the poisoned atmosphere created by Watergate in his second term.

Nixon's basic responses to the Presidential news conference may have also been caused at least partly by his earlier experiences with the media.

According to Small in Political Power and the Press, President Nixon believed that his difficulties with the press dated back to his role in the Congressional investigations of Alger Hiss. According to Small, Nixon stated that one of the aftermaths of the 1949 Hiss case was that for the next dozen years Nixon claimed he was smeared in a campaign that aimed itself at ". . .bigamy, forgery, drunkenness, insanity, thievery, anti-Semitism . . .and perjury."[8]

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[8]Frank Mankiewicz, Perfectly Clear, Nixon from Whittier to Watergate, (New York, 1973), p. 47; Small, Political Power and the Press, p. 120.

Nixon's specific distrust of the newspapers may have begun as early as 1952. It was then that newspapers broke the story of the "Nixon Fund"--$18,235.00 collected from wealthy contributors--to pay for his 1950 Senate campaign expenses against Helen Gahagan Douglas in California's 14th Congressional District. At a time that it appeared that Eisenhower was about to force Nixon to resign as Republican nominee for Vice-President, Nixon delivered his famous televised "Checkers" speech.[9]

Nixon wrote later in Six Crises:

> My only hope to win rested with millions of people I would never meet, sitting in groups of two or three. . .in their living rooms, watching. . .me on television. . . .I made up my mind that until after this broadcast, my only releases to the press would be for the purpose of building up the audience. . . . This time I was determined to tell my story directly to the people rather than funnel it . . .through a press account.10

Nixon's attitude toward the television crews in the studio that evening has been compared to his later attitude during the 1960 debates with John F. Kennedy. Nixon was certainly under great pressure both times and

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[9]Wise, Politics of Lying, p. 326.

[10]Richard M. Nixon, Six Crises, (New York, 1962), pp. 102-107.

in each instance refused any rehearsal time and declined to tell technicians of his desired movement on the set.

No sooner was Nixon off the air from the "Checkers" plea than it was apparent his plan had worked. In less than a week Republican headquarters in Washington reported delivery of some 300,000 letters and telegrams running 350 to one in favor of Nixon.[11]

In July 1958, Nixon's "kitchen debate" success over Premier Nikita Khrushchev in Moscow won the then Vice-President plaudits that may have encouraged his later less-successful debates with Kennedy.[12] Logically, Nixon may have believed the winning combination of his use of television in the "Checkers" speech and his Whittier debating ability in the "kitchen debate" formed an ingredient that would defeat his 1960 Democratic opponent.[13] The same logic may have led to his later Presidential preference for debate-like "one-on-one" television conversations and interviews with anchor people during his first term.

In his 1960 campaign, however, when Nixon made

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[11]Auld, "Television and Politics," pp. 86-87.

[12]Henry D. Spalding, The Nixon Nobody Knows, (New York, 1972), pp. 394-95.

[13]Bruce Mazlish, In Search of Nixon, (New York, 1972), p. 77.

the to be regretted decision to debate it was television that was his undoing. Radio images of the debate slightly favored Nixon's deep resonant "Mid-America" voice over Kennedy's high-pitched, Boston-Harvard accent. On television, though, Kennedy's virility overshadowed Nixon's less photogenic features and won the Senator national exposure that proved disastrous to the better known incumbent Vice-President.[14] That defeat was a setback for the Nixon philosophy of going over the heads of his imagined newspaper enemies via TV to reach the American public. The ploy was successfully used in Nixon's later campaign against George McGovern, however, in what author Timothy Crouse termed a "non-campaign." The tactic will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter III.[15]

After the Hiss case, the "Checkers' speech and the Kennedy debates another incident reflects the President's attitudes toward the press: the Nixon press statement of November 7, 1962, which has come to be dubbed the "You won't have Nixon to kick around anymore" statement.[16]

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[14]Auld, "Television and Politics," pp. 88-94.

[15]Theodore H. White, The Making of the President 1960, (New York, 1961), pp. 290-95; Timothy Crouse, The Boys on the Bus, (New York, 1973), p. 107.

[16]Small, Political Power and the Press, p. 120.

According to Jules Witcover, Nixon's 17-minute fatigue-and-booze induced outburst, noted for both its self-pity and courage, ". . .revealed a capacity for deep bitterness in Nixon that through his long public career and long sparring match with the nation's press he nearly always managed to control, or to cover up." Witcover wrote that the "last press conference" demonstrated a Nixon ambivalence, that appears later in his Presidential press conferences, when the defeated candidate for Governor vacillated from vitriol to condescension, saying on one hand, "I have no complaints about the press coverage," but on the other that ". . . for once, gentlemen, I would appreciate if you would write what I say. . . ."[17]

Time magazine's 1962 epitaph read, ". . .barring a miracle, Nixon's public career has ended."[18]

A few weeks after that "last press conference" ABC broadcast a documentary titled "The Political Obituary of Richard M. Nixon." Alger Hiss was one of those interviewed on the program. ABC was flooded with complaints--eighty thousand letters and telegrams--as well as thousands of phone calls. Nixon's response was,

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[17]Jules Witcover, The Resurrection of Richard Nixon, (New York, 1970), pp. 13-23.

[18]Ibid., p. 25.

"What does an attack by one convicted perjurer mean when weighed on the scales against the thousands of wires and letters from patriotic Americans?" The ABC documentary incident provided strong evidence that Richard M. Nixon was hardly "dead."

In both the "last news conference" and the Howard K. Smith ABC documentary, it was TV that Nixon may have seen as his political salvation. At the end of his seventeen minute dialogue in November 1962, Nixon was to say:

> I think it's time that our great newspapers have at least the same objectivity, the same fullness of coverage, that television has. And I can only say thank God for television and radio for keeping the newspapers a little more honest.19

Interesting in this context is to note the resemblance between Nixon as Vice-President and Spiro Agnew as Vice-President. Nixon's use of Agnew in the Autumn 1969 anti-media campaign--discussed later--has a strong parallel with Nixon's own role in the Eisenhower administration. While "Ike" posed as a national leader and statesman, Nixon implied the Democrats were traitors. According to one historian, he called Adlai Stevenson a "Ph.D. from the Acheson College of Cowardly Communist Containment," termed the Truman administration

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[19]Small, Political Power and the Press, pp. 120-21.

"the four-headed monster that was Korea, Communism, corruption and controls," and said that the Eisenhower administration "has kicked out Communists and fellow travelers and security risks not by the hundreds but by the thousands." Though the targets were different, the assignments of both Vice-Presidents were quite similar.[20]

Finally, the men surrounding Nixon in his 1968 Presidential campaign may have influenced his later uses of the press and the press conference. Surrogates' attempts to "protect" Nixon and their insulating influence on him have been noted by several historians.[21] Nixon's selection of advertising men as key staff members was not unique. Eisenhower had used them. Five men experienced in the use of mass communication, advertising or law were selected for the massive 1968 communication campaign: H. R. Haldeman, William Safire, Leonard Garment, Harry Treleaven and Herbert Klein. Their plan to package and market the Nixon image passed most of the media unnoticed at the time. James Reston was one exception, however, when he wrote:

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[20]Auld, "Television and Politics," pp. 114-15.

[21]John Osborne, The Fourth Year of the Nixon Watch, (New York, 1973), p. 122; Arthur Krock, The Consent of the Governed, (Boston, 1971), p. 136.

> His television performances are masterpieces of contrived candor. He seems to be telling everything with an air of reckless sincerity, but nearly always in a controlled situation, with the questioners carefully chosen, the questions solicited from whole states or regions, but carefully screened.
>
> He is now complaining publicly about how he and Mr. Agnew are misrepresented in the columns of the New York Times, but he has been refusing to be questioned on the record by editors of the Times and most other major newspapers ever since the very beginning of the campaign.
>
> Mr. Humphrey and Mr. Wallace submitted to questions by CBS, but Mr. Nixon sent tapes of replies made in his carefully prepared broadcasts. And his refusal to debate Mr. Humphrey on television is merely one more incident in a long campaign of packaged broadcasts. . . .[22]

Despite Nixon's avowal that his was not going to be an antiseptic television campaign, that is precisely what it was. And Nixon won and found he could ignore press conferences and be politically successful.

The two decades of struggle leading to his Presidency certainly had some influence, albeit difficult to measure, on his later use of Presidential press conferences. Nixon's hatred of the press; his using television to "go directly to the people" and by-passing his adversaries; his 1960 debate mistake and 1968 controlled-press-environment victory, both at the hands

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[22]Auld, "Television and Politics," p. 104.

of television, had established a pattern, a plan of action with the press, certain to be tested in the give-and-take of his Presidential news conferences.

Paradoxes between Nixon's early views of television (". . .thank God for television and radio for keeping the newspapers a little more honest,") and later criticism ("I have never. . .seen such outrageous. . . reporting in 27 years of public life.") were explained by David Wise in 1973 when he wrote:

> In discussing Nixon and television. . . one must carefully distinguish between television as a mechanical means of communication and television as an intellectual instrument. "Pure" television is okay, television news is not. As President, Nixon's use of television flowed logically from these basic premises; thus, at every opportunity, Nixon solemnly addressed the nation, but he usually avoided the give-and-take of the televised news conference. Only in the first setting did Nixon have total control--23

Early experiences with the media may underlie the basic responses President Nixon made with regard to his sparse Presidential meetings with the press. None of the responses, save the brief attempts at "limited" press conferences, were substantial in terms of public relations substance. Most were attempts to subordinate the media. The President limited an avenue of feedback

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[23]Wise, Politics of Lying, p. 375.

by his reaction, and confused a one-way advertising approach to communication with the public relations concept of satisfactory two-way communication.

CHAPTER III

PRESIDENT NIXON'S PRESS CONFERENCES: FIRST TERM

> . . .[W]hen information which properly belongs to the public is systematically withheld by those in power, the people soon become ignorant of their own affairs, distrustful of those who manage them, and--eventually--incapable of determining their own destinies.
>
> --President Richard M. Nixon
> March 8, 1972

In his first Presidential press conference, held one week after his inauguration, President Nixon made no opening statement and answered 14 questions. He delivered his remarks from the low stage in the White House East Room, the same place occasionally used by President Johnson,[1] with only a standing microphone necessary to record his comments for the press between him and some 450 members of the press. He shunned the lectern used by his two immediate predecessors.[2]

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[1]Phillips, "Radio and Television," p. 37.

[2]New York Times, January 28, 1969, p. 1; 12.

The President noted in response to a question regarding curbing inflation, that he did not believe that policy, especially foreign policy, should be made by "off-the-cuff" responses at press conferences, "or any other kinds of conferences," saying policy should be made in an orderly way. The President made no other comments in reference to press conferences, and the New York Times described him as "getting off to a good start" with "nervous determination," in his press conferences.[3]

During a February news conference Nixon again intimated he was reluctant to use conferences for policy formation to "indicate publicly" his plans on a dock strike, noting it would have the effect of "telling the parties to do nothing."[4]

At his third press conference, announcing his trip to Europe, the President spoke without notes, again standing alone behind a free-standing microphone in the East Room. The news conference was televised, as were his previous ones, and characterized by "an unusually professional air," according to the New York Times.

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[3]Ibid., p. 13.

[4]Public Papers of the Presidents, Richard Nixon 1969, (Washington, 1971), p. 73. Hereafter cited as Public Papers, [date].

In one response Nixon noted his belief in explaining unpopular issues to the people to gain their support.[5] And, for the second time, the President elaborated on the press conference and foreign policy. He responded to a question of possible resumption of bombing in North Vietnam by saying:

> Well, Mr. Wilson [Richard L. Wilson of The Register and Tribune Syndicate, Des Moines, Iowa] that question is one that I have given thought to, but it is one I think should not be answered in this forum.
>
> I believe that it is more effective in international policy to use deeds rather than words threatening deeds in order to accomplish objectives.6

During his fourth press meeting, on March 14, 1969, the President announced plans for modifying the Sentinel missile program and once again alluded to the use of press conferences in making foreign policy. His news conference was televised, and the President responded to a question by Merriman Smith concerning repeated attacks on the Demilitarized Zone in Vietnam. Nixon noted a warning he had given to North Vietnam in his last news conference, and said that he would ". . .issue a warning only once. . ." implying that he viewed

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[5]Ibid., p. 189.

[6]New York Times, March 5, 1969, p. 8.

press conferences, and the press, as vehicles of foreign policy communication. As he had in the past press meetings, the President noted, however, that certain sensitive foreign policy subjects should not be discussed in a public forum. Again, the New York Times lauded Nixon's presence in the news conference, noting the President's lack of notes or lectern, saying that he ". . .demonstrated . . .again today . . .he is a [good] student." The Times commented further that the President's opening statement, the longest in any of his conferences thus far, was nearly identical to the 1,500 word handout given to reporters before the press conference began.[7]

By April 18, the Nixon Presidential press conference procedure had been established, so far as techniques were concerned. The news conference was held late in the morning, in the East Room of the White House and, like those of President Eisenhower, lasted about 30 minutes. It was broadcast on radio and TV. Again, the President spoke without notes or lectern. Most questions dealt with a North Korean attack on a U.S. reconnaissance flight. One question concerning the press, dealing with the press conference, was asked. A reporter

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[7]Ibid., March 15, 1969, p. 16.

suggested that the President might go "directly to the country" on the Anti-Ballistic Missile issue. President Nixon's answer reflected his apparent regard for the media in early 1969:

> No, I have no plans at this time to go to the country as you have suggested, though as a matter of fact, I consider a press conference as going to the country. I find that these press conferences are rather well covered by the country both by television as they are today and also by the members of the press.[8]

Thus, after five news conferences, the President had referred to the sessions with the press on five different occasions as accepted conveyors of policy. Nixon had, moreover, stressed the importance of deeds--as opposed to press conference words--for a successful foreign policy on at least two occasions. He held about one press conference a month during his first four months in office.

Two months went by before the next Presidential news conference. On June 19, 1969, the President answered questions in the East Room. He made his first clear reference to a potential adversary relationship with the press when he commented on an article written by former Defense Secretary Clark Clifford. The President noted, "from reading all the newspapers," that he allowed more

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[8]Ibid., April 19, 1969, p. 14.

controversy and open dissent than in any administration, "in recent years."[9]

Another two-month gap passed before the next press conference, on September 26. (The intervening summer months saw the beginning of U.S. troop withdrawals from Vietnam.) President Nixon mentioned his use of backgrounders to brief members of the press regarding Republican party matters, and repeated his philosophy of making ". . .our actions make the news rather than the words make the news. . ." in comments regarding the press. The first indications that any Presidential "honeymoon" with the press was over, so far as deference to the President in the framing of news conference questions, became apparent in that September news conference. An unidentified reporter asked when the President was going to make some ". . .honest-to-goodness changes. . ." in bureaucrats that had been "in power" for long periods of time. Another said in a quote, ". . .your draft cut is a fraud because. . . ." The New York Times noted that he addressed each query crisply and evenly, but that there was a suggestion of impatience with critics on the campuses and on Capitol Hill.[10] In an interview with the Times, Roger Ailes,

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[9]Public Papers, 1969, p. 476.

[10]Ibid., pp. 748-58.

Nixon's television advisor, noted the President's mechanical skill with the medium, "I talk to him in technical language and he knows it all. He can time himself perfectly. . .He's like clockwork. . . .He doesn't use a teleprompter."[11]

(On October 15, Moratorium Day, hundreds of thousands of war protestors gathered across the nation, and in Washington, in a generally orderly protest against the Vietnam War.)[12]

In a rather short untelevised press conference on October 20 at which only six questions were asked, the President, following a suggestion by Press Secretary Ron Ziegler, disclosed plans to brief the press on specific subjects, then allow follow-up questioning. A count of follow-up questions in Nixon's first five 1969 press conferences showed that about 40.4 per cent of the questions fell into the follow-up category,[13] more than the average of 32.6 per cent found in other studies.[14] He also discussed details of a new press

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[11]New York Times, September 21, 1969, p. 84.

[12]Wise, Politics of Lying, p. 336.

[13]Dunn, "Presidential Press Conference," p. 34.

[14]McGuire, "Democracy's Confrontation, I," Journalism Quarterly, Winter, 1967, p. 642.

room--noting that it would be useful for sound-on-film recording. President Nixon promised that when the press room was complete, the new press conference format of having sessions on a "subject-by-subject" basis would go into effect on a "sometimes" basis. He limitcd that late-autumn meeting with the press to a lengthy brief on Judge Clement F. Haynsworth's nomination to the Supreme Court. (In February 1971, a news conference was limited in numbers of reporters, and later, in May 1971 and June 22, 1972, conferences were limited to domestic questions. No other "limited" press conferences of the type suggested by the President were held. No evidence was found in this research to indicate why the format was abandoned after such little use.) At one point in that eighth news conference of his Presidency, Nixon noted his agreement with pro-Haynsworth editorials in the Washington Post and the St. Louis Post Dispatch, saying he believed the Washington article to be ". . .quite a thoughtful editorial [and] quite candid. . ." in substance.[15]

On November 3, Nixon delivered a major address on Vietnam, designed to counteract another antiwar demonstration scheduled for November 15. Following the President's speech, newsmen on all three major TV networks

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[15]New York Times, October 21, 1969, p. 34.

followed with their customary "instant analysis," a term originated later by Vice-President Spiro Agnew in his November 13, Des Moines speech. Public response to the commentary was "very negative," according to Herb Klein, director of the Office of Executive Communication. Public discontent with the "instant analysis" and the television medium provided situations similar to earlier ones surrounding Nixon's "Checkers" speech, and "The Political Obituary of Richard M. Nixon." "Instant analysis" may have been perceived by Nixon as a threat to his established tactic of going over the heads of the press, directly to the people.[16]

President Nixon had no press conferences during November 1969. Vice-President Agnew made his "Gaggle of Commentators" speech on November 13 in Des Moines, Iowa, attacking a press monopoly by "the dirty dozen." That speech marked the start of the Nixon anti-media campaign. Though later denied by the President, William J. Small notes that the Agnew speeches were written--at least in part--by Presidential Assistant Patrick J. Buchanan.[17]

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[16]Wise, Politics of Lying, pp. 327-38.

[17]Bill Greeley, "RTNDA Hears Bill Small Rap Nixon & Co. On Media Posture," Variety, October 17, 1973, p. 24.

The last news conference of that year was televised, and conducted at 9 p.m., December 8, to insure prime-time coverage. One question was asked relating to how much the American people ought to know about the war in Laos. The President related generally the progress being made in Laos and stated that public interest would not be served by any further press conference discussions. Another question dealt with Vice-President Agnew's two attacks on the broadcast media during the past weeks. The President answered the question by saying, in part:

> The Vice-President does not clear his speeches with me. . . .However, I believe that the Vice-President rendered a public service in talking in a very dignified and courageous way about a problem that many Americans are concerned about, and that is the coverage by news media--and particularly television news media [sic]--of public figures.
>
> Now let me be quite precise. He [Agnew] did not advocate censorship. On the contrary, he advocated that there should be free expression. He did not oppose bias. On the contrary, he recognized--as I do--that there should be opinion.
>
> . . .I don't want a bunch of intellectual eunuchs either writing the news or talking about the news. I like excitement in the news, whether it's on television or whether it's in the columns.
>
> He did say. . .that television stations might well follow the practice of newspapers of separating news from opinion. When opinion is expressed, label it so, but don't

mix the opinion in with the reporting of the news.18

Despite the Presidential disclaimer concerning the independence with which Agnew made his anti-press statements, William J. Small notes several correspondents did not believe the President. Small cites columnists Crosby S. Noyes, Richard Wilson, Clark Mollenhoff and William F. Buckley.[19]

Agnew had been selected as the President's blunt instrument in carrying out an attack on the press.[20] Thus, while President Kennedy was tagged with "news management" and President Johnson was identified with a "credibility gap," President Nixon became associated with "Agnewism" during the autumn of his first year in the Presidency. It was a press tactic later found to have originated with the President himself.[21]

In answer to another question regarding how fair the news media had been in reporting on the President, the Vice-President and the Nixon administration in

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[18]New York Times, December 9, 1969, p. 16.

[19]Small, Political Power and the Press, pp. 134-36.

[20]James M. Perry, Us and Them, (New York, 1973), pp. 11-12.

[21]Scott M. Cutlip - Patrick J. Buchanan interview, November 27, 1973.

general, the President replied that he believed the media had been generally fair. He voiced no complaints about the extent of coverage received, and concluded in a "Checkers" vein, he would have no complaints so long as the media ". . .allows, as it does tonight, an opportunity for me to be heard directly by the people and then the television commentators to follow me." Near the end of the news conference a reporter asked the President about his opinion of the philosophy that the role of the press was to hold an administration to account for its actions. The President replied, in part, that he had derived a great deal of benefit from criticism, and ". . .I've never known when I was short of it." The same reporter had also asked the President why only three press conferences had been held during the past six months. Nixon's reply was that he tried to have press conferences when he thought there was a public interest, as differing from a press interest, or his private interest. He also pointed out the use of other devices, such as conferences in his office and major television addresses, as means of Presidential communication, and said:

> If I consider that the press and the public needs [sic] more information than I'm giving through press conferences I'll have more. I welcome the opportunity to have them. I'm not afraid of them, just

as the press is not afraid of me.22

At year's end, President Nixon had held nine press conferences, eight broadcast by electronic media. He had spoken to the nation on radio or TV on only seven other occasions.[23]

During his first news conference of 1970, President Nixon made one allusion to "several recent stories" concerning U.S. foreign policy with Libya that he disagreed with. He chided the newspapers for misrepresenting the "pro-Arab. . .pro-Israel" policy in the Mid-East saying, "We are pro-peace." Answering another question, he reiterated his belief in good performance being its own reward by saying:

> Now I know all the words, I know all the gimmicks and the phrases that would win the applause of black audiences and professional civil rights leaders. I'm not going to use them. I'm interested in deeds. I'm interested in closing the performance gap. . . I would rather be measured by my deeds than all the fancy speeches I may have made.24

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[22]New York Times, December 9, 1969, p. 16.

[23]New York Times Index, 1969, (New York, 1970), Volumes 57-58, passim.

[24]New York Times, January 31, 1970, p. 14.

In April, the White House press corps was moved out of the West Lobby into its new, and luxurious, two-level quarters built over the White House swimming pool. The deep-pile beige carpets, suede Chesterfield sofas and Currier and Ives prints, however, were also accompanied by two Marine guards barring the way to the West-Wing entrance. The press could no longer see guests coming and going to meet the President. At about the same time, Ronald Ziegler moved his twice-daily press briefings from the press secretary office to the briefing room in the press center. There was no longer easy opportunity for a reporter to linger in Ziegler's office after a briefing to ask additional questions. Both changes tended to isolate the reporters.[25]

Another news conference, the first to be televised in more than three months, was conducted on May 8, 1970. Student protests over U.S. entry into Cambodia dominated headlines, and President Nixon was described in the New York Times as being visibly nervous. Most of the conference questions dealt with demonstrations and Southeast Asia. The President answered a question regarding repression of the press, saying he believed that the United States was not "headed for a revolution," that demonstrations served as a "safety valve":

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[25]Wise, Politics of Lying, pp. 342-44.

> I do not see that the critics of my policies. . .are repressed. I note from reading the press, from listening to television, that criticism is very vigorous, sometimes quite personal. It has every right to be. I have no complaints about it.

Nixon's claim was at variance with his constant insistence that he did not watch television or worry about his image.[26]

Nancy Dickerson (NBC), asking a question, made note of an Agnew speech given earlier that same day that attacked opponents of administration policy as "a cadre of Jeremiahs. . .a gloomy coalition of choleric young intellectuals and tired, embittered elders." Nixon replied he would not "tone him down," simply because the Vice-President had a different point of view. Thus, the President once again endorsed his policy of "Agnewism."[27]

In answer to another question, he expressed regret that his May first use of "bums" to describe dissenters had been misinterpreted:

> All the members of this press corps know that I have for years defended the right of dissent. I have always opposed the use of violence.

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[26] Ibid., p. 340; 376.

[27] Public Papers, 1970, p. 416.

In another response, the President noted in regard to the Cambodia invasion that, "rockets by the thousands and small arms (italics mine) by the millions," had been captured in Cambodia. The Alderson Reporting Company, Inc., official transcript given the press read, "rockets by the thousand and small arms ammunition (italics mine) by the millions. . . ." The substantial difference is noted here simply to demonstrate that a president's words were subject to change by the White House--even in a presidential press conference.[28]

Finally, Nixon answered a question regarding the office of the President being isolated:

> This is an open Administration. It will continue to be. I also think that people should have the right to speak out as they do. . . [in congress]. . .in the media and the universities.

(On June 25, 1970, however, the New York Times and the Washington Post were excluded from a press briefing at San Clemente, California. Both newspapers were outspoken critics of the war.)[29]

The senior wire service representative had signaled

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[28]Ibid., p. 418; New York Times, June 11, 1970, p. 8.

[29]New York Times, June 25, 1970, p. 4.

the end of that press conference with his customary "Thank you Mr. President," when President Nixon displayed the Franklin Delano Roosevelt press conference tack of courting reporters, or his sense of public relations with the press, by saying:

> Could I ask the members of the press to wait one moment? For 26 years a member of this press corps did just what Frank Cormier did then--he was known as the man who said, thank you, Mr. President [sic]. Three weeks ago he met a tragic death, and as we close this conference, I would like to suggest that we all stand for a minute in memory of Merriman Smith. Thank you.30

At 4:55 the following morning, the President and his valet drove to the Lincoln Memorial, where he talked to a gathering crowd of about 50 curious students. The President related the discussion had been useful, "There were no TV cameras, no press."[31]

On July 1, the President had a "conversation" with representatives of the three networks: John Chancellor, Eric Sevareid and Howard K. Smith. The exchange did not fall into the earlier definition of a news conference, and is mentioned here to separate it from the primary

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[30]Ibid., May 9, 1970, p. 8.

[31]Ronald Ziegler press briefing, May 9, 1970. Public Papers, 1970, pp. 422-26.

vehicle of this study. Time magazine properly differentiated between a "conversation" and what it termed, a "mass" press conference.[32]

(Congressional findings by the Senate Watergate Committee examining Patrick Buchanan's papers revealed that Larry Higby, assistant to H. R. Haldeman, on July 16, 1970, memoed Jeb Magruder, deputy director, Committee for the Reelection of the President, on possible action to start on a petition "by lots of people" demanding NBC newsman Chet Huntley's resignation. Huntley had allegedly made unkind remarks about Nixon in Life magazine.)

During his press conference of July 20, the President answered a question dealing with Presidential isolation, by first denying that he had become isolated from the press and then by acknowledging that he had given consideration to an earlier suggestion that his office was becoming secluded.[33]

Nixon's press conference of July 30, his first Presidential press meeting outside Washington, took place in Los Angeles. As usual Nixon gave the first two

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[32]"Winding up the Cambodian Hard Sell," Time, July 13, 1970, p. 7.

[33]New York Times, July 21, 1970, p. 16.

questions of the news conference to the two wire services, and he answered a question regarding objectivity and fairness of the nation's press. The question was in regard to Vice-President Agnew's attacks on the press. The President dodged the question, saying:

> Well, my reaction is that I recall once having comments about the press in California when I was here, and that didn't seem to get me very far. All I can say now is: I just wish I had as good a press as my wife has, and I'd be satisfied.

In response to another question, the President noted the importance of the press (he used the word "people") of California to participate in a Presidential news conference. He described it as "bringing the White House to San Clemente, or to Fargo or to Louisville," implying the value of two-way communication away from the more formal atmosphere of the White House.[34]

A few days later, on August 4, President Nixon made his Manson "slip" in remarks made to reporters in Denver. The President called Charles Manson ". . .guilty, directly or indirectly, of eight murders without reason."[35]

The incident occurred during impromptu remarks to

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[34]Ibid., July 31, 1970, p. 10.

[35]Ibid., August 5, 1970, p. 21.

newsmen that were filmed for television. Unlike a regular press conference, no questions were asked during that press statement and Nixon's error, unchallenged by media questioning, was dutifully reported.[36]

During his next press conference, over four months later, on December 10, 1970, the President was asked about the Manson comment and admitted it was probably unjustified. Later, Edward P. Morgan referred to that press conference as ". . .one of the roughest news conferences that I have ever seen any president undergo." Morgan was referring to the Nixon admission of a mistake in his Manson statement of August 4. Morgan defended the value of the press conference by saying, "You don't get this sort of thing [Presidential admission of error] in a handout." That incident may have never occurred had questions been allowed in Denver.

Indeed, that should have been a "rough" press conference. Twenty-eight White House reporters, unhappy with insufficient follow-up questions at Nixon's Presidential news conferences, had met a few days before in the Hotel Washington and decided to insure more "tough" and more follow-up questions. They informed the

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[36]Roland Evans Jr. and Robert Novak, Nixon in the White House: The Frustration of Power, (New York, 1971), p. 366.

White House of the meeting, and the President spent several days preparing for it.[37] Despite that unusual preparation, only about 25 per cent of the questions at the meeting were follow-up.[38]

During that news conference, the President was asked a question regarding the paucity of his press conferences. He gave a lengthy answer that included other forms of Presidential communication open to him. He noted reports, speeches and interviews as examples. Nixon said that the American people were entitled to see him directly and not ". . .only through the press." He expressed concern over dominating television too much, a problem that had plagued President Johnson, and the question of giving opponents equal time. (The President may have made a Freudian slip regarding his feelings toward the press in that answer. His exact words were: ". . .one network early this summer decided that it would be necessary to give opposition [italics mine] to the President's policy--opponents [italics mine] to the President's policy--equal time. . .") The President suggested ways of improving press conferences, such as, "more conferences in the [Oval] office; perhaps more one-on-one;. . .a television conference in which

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[37]Small, Political Power and the Press, p. 186.

[38]Public Papers, 1970, pp. 1101-11.

. . .three of the top columnists. . ." participate, but did not answer the question of infrequency.[39]

The next day, Senate Watergate Committee testimony indicates that Magruder sent a memo to H. R. Haldeman, the President's chief-of-staff, with suggestions of what to do because of unhappiness with the way the press had questioned the President. Magruder explained in the memo that,

> Ten telegrams have been drafted by Buchanan. They will be sent to Time and Newsweek today by 20 names around the country from our letter-writing system. . . .Letters to the editors of the Times, (Washington) Post, Star, Chicago Daily News, St. Louis Post Dispatch are being prepared and sent.[40]

During the 19 weeks between the last two press conferences of 1970, New York Times Washington correspondent Max Frankel criticized the infrequency of conferences by noting that a series of important events had taken place, including acknowledgement of bombing in North Vietnam, the Son Tay landing in North Vietnam, ". . .Soviet cheating in the Suez cease-fire Zone. . . [and] hope of enacting major welfare reform. . . ." Frankel noted that there was a Marxist government in

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[39]New York Times, December 11, 1970, p. 32.

[40]Variety, October 17, 1973, p. 24.

Chile, and a threat of another missile crisis in Cuba. Walter Hickel had been removed from the cabinet, he wrote. Frankel pointed out the fact that the December 10 news conference would only be President Nixon's 18th in two years and compared the scant Nixon record for press conferences with those of past presidents. Frankel suggested that the value of the whole proceeding was questionable.[41]

Early in 1971, Eric Sevareid (CBS) reviewed Richard Nixon's problems with news conferences. Sevareid noted that the conference audiences were roughly the size of Congress; that Nixon had come into office with a popular vote of only 42 per cent; that Nixon had a long-standing dislike and distrust of the press. Sevareid defined the Nixon offensive of "Agnewism" in 1969 and 1970 as impugning, in advance, the credibility of reporters and interpreters of Presidential actions. Sevareid noted the President was trying to improve press conferences. He cited the series of "conversations" with network reporters and criticized the, "soft -- diffuse, deliberately time consuming. . .off the point," answers. Sevareid suggested allowing each of the four network reporters 10 minutes direct and exclusive interview time, with the last 20 minutes of the conversation

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[41]New York Times, December 10, 1970, p. 22.

a "free for all." Sevareid concluded:

> A bearing of friendliness and candor toward the press will not endanger him or his policies. In the long run it will reinsure both.[42]

The President's first press conference of 1971, held on February 17, was limited to 40 reporters to keep it at "manageable levels."[43] Questions dealt mainly with Southeast Asia, and the follow-up rate was over 50 per cent.

(Six days later, CBS aired "The Selling of the Pentagon," a key event in the developing abrasive relationship between the President and the press.)[44]

The Presidential news conference of March 4, 1971, which came on the heels of press criticism of the South Vietnamese entry into Laos, was described by Presidential aides as being one of the best Nixon press "performances" up to that time.[45] The President, however, answered an early question that demonstrated his growing insularity and failure to understand the importance of feedback. He said in part, ". . .I. . .can't tell you what the feeling is in this city. I can tell you what

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[42]New York Times, January 27, 1971, p. 35.

[43]Ibid., February 18, 1971, pp. 14-15.

[44]Small, Political Power and the Press, p. 303.

[45]New York Times, March 5, 1971, p. 12.

my plans are." President Nixon had missed a vital benefit of press conferences, one which was noted by President Wilson at his first news meeting, when he said:

> Please do not tell the country what Washington is thinking, for that does not make any difference. Tell Washington what the country is thinking. . .

George Reedy amplified President Wilson's comment when he said the press conference is ". . .the only occasion in which a president has an opportunity for brushing up against reality with some regularity. There is no group except the press that will confront him on a face-to-face basis with open skepticism." Reedy suggested that the feedback made a president uncomfortable, perhaps, but that it was a good opportunity for him to escape the dangerous insularity caused by sycophants who surrounded men of tremendous power.[46]

Near the end of the press conference, a question was asked concerning U.S. commitment in Indochina. The President's reply reflected his earlier feelings that actions speak louder than words in his press conferences:

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[46]Small, Political Power and the Press, p. 187.

> I would suggest that you ladies and gentlemen [of the press]. . .always pretty much underestimated what I am capable of doing in terms of withdrawing forces. . . Let me put it in perspective. . .We have had a great deal of discussion about Laos at the last press conference and I can see that this is still an interest here. . . .
>
> I recall at the time that we went into Cambodia, and all of you out there looking on television will remember what I said. [The President followed with a reiteration of his past remarks.]
>
> Many members of the press disagreed with me. They thought that was not an accurate description of what would happen. They are entitled to that view. Night after night after I announced the decision to go into Cambodia, on television it was indicated that decision would have the opposite effect, that it would increase American casualties. . . .
>
> Now I realize that night after night for the past three weeks on television there is [sic] a drumbeat of suggestion--not from all, but from some of the commentators--and I can understand why they disagree. From the same ones who said Cambodia wouldn't work, that this [Laos] isn't going to work.
>
> Now, here in a press conference, we can debate as to whether or not my view of it is right or wrong. I hope for the good of the country mine is, and if it is right, what you say now doesn't make any difference. ...[47]

The comments illustrate the President's antagonism toward "some" commentators during early 1971, and show his belief that events would overshadow their reporting.

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[47] New York Times, March 5, 1971, p. 12.

During a United Press International annual breakfast meeting on April 20, Eugene V. Risher, White House correspondent for UPI, spoke to his fellow newsmen. Risher said that the President and other White House aides believed the press was ". . .either incapable or unwilling to accurately reflect his [Nixon's] motives and personality." Risher noted that this belief had caused an adversary relationship with many newsmen, who felt they were being used.[48] In an interview with Barbara Walters on the NBC Today show the month before, however, Nixon denied any concern about his image with the American public. As noted earlier, it was a denial he made many times as President.[49]

A White House press conference on April 29 dealt mainly with troop reductions in Vietnam. The President made a short allusion to television inaccuracy when he noted that TV might have given viewers the incorrect impression that Washington was in a state of seige from anti-war protesters. He chided the press, in answering another question, when he made reference to Vice-President Agnew being quoted directly after an off-the-record

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[48] Ibid., April 20, 1971, p. 39.

[49] Wise, Politics of Lying, p. 275.

press conference.[50]

Three days later the President held another news conference limited to two dozen reporters and domestic questions in San Clemente, California. About 40 per cent of the questions were follow-up questions. The President was asked a question dealing with subpoenaing news material. His reply was revealing in terms of his stated views of the press:

> I do not believe that. . .network commentators or newspaper reporters--as distinguished from editorial writers who. . . have a right to every bias and should express such bias--are above criticism. . . .[W]hen you go. . .to the question of government action which requires the revealing of sources, then I take a very jaundiced view of that kind of action. . . .
>
> . . .But as far as the subpoenaing of [reporters] notes are concerned. . .as far as bringing any pressure on the networks as the government is concerned, I do not support that. . . .
>
> . . .Generally speaking, I also feel that I do not have to say much about that because regardless of what I say you're going to say anything you want about me. And it usually may not be very good.[51]

The President on one hand upheld the right to privileged communication to reporters, but on the other

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[50]New York Times, April 30, 1971, p. 18.

[51]Ibid., May 2, 1971, p. 66.

displayed his pessimism regarding fair treatment of facts by news reporters and of bias shown by commentators.

During a televised news conference on June 1, the President answered 21 questions regarding China, the U.S. prisoners of war, and war protesters. At the end of the conference, a reporter asked the President to account for two major public opinion polls showing that about two-thirds of the American people did not believe they were being told the truth about the Vietnam War. The President answered that the fact he would accomplish his goal of troop withdrawals would end the credibility gap with the American people. Once again, he equated credibility with his actions.

(Three months later, Dr. Lewis Fielding's office was burglarized by the White House "Plumbers.")[52]

The President noted during that June press conference that he did not believe the Presidential press conference to be a proper forum for commenting on political or partisan questions.[53] That press meeting was criticized by the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. Reporters were criticized for asking lengthy questions and "grandstanding," and the President was criticized for his lengthy answers.[54]

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[52]National Observer, July 20, 1974, p. 14.

[53]New York Times, January 2, 1971, p. 24.

[54]St. Louis Post-Dispatch, June 3, 1971, p. 20.

President Nixon announced his planned Moscow visit to a surprise White House press conference on October 12, 1971. He began the conference shortly before noon, and "embargoed" the news information until noon, to allow simultaneous release in Moscow. The President urged reporters not to speculate on Supreme Court nominations or Vietnam troop withdrawals at one point; at another he commented that press speculation regarding an European Security Conference had been correct.[55]

(A month later, the Washington Post published details of an FBI investigation of CBS's Danial Schorr, harassment apparently the result of Schorr's criticism of an earlier Nixon speech.[56] Indeed, telephones of 17 government officials and newsmen were tapped in 1971.[57] Abrasions between the President and the press intensified.)

President Nixon was selected by Time magazine as the "Man of the Year," in 1971, and as in his earlier interview with Barbara Walters, told Time correspondent Jerrold Schecter, "I care about substance," and that he never worried about what the press said about him.[58]

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[55]New York Times, October 13, 1971, p. 18.

[56]Michael C. Emery and Ted C. Smythe, eds, Readings in Mass Communication, (Dubuque, 1972), p. 413.

[57]Chicago Tribune, June 14, 1974, p. 16.

[58]New York Times, December 27, 1971, p. 14.

In an article in the New York Times on New Year's Eve, 1971, James Reston summarized his views of President Nixon's tactics with the press:

> . . .[A]t the end of Mr. Nixon's third year in office, there is an almost complete breakdown of trustful communication between the Administration and the press. But the pattern of action by the President, especially when he has suffered an important diplomatic or strategic reverse. . .is fairly obvious.
>
> If you study his self-revealing book, "Six Crises," you get at least an inkling of his psychology. When he loses, he lashes back. . . .
>
> In adversity, he has a weakness for the dramatic gesture. Are things going badly in Vietnam? Suddenly he invades Cambodia and later Laos. . .don't take Richard Nixon for granted. Unpredictability is sometimes a virtue.
>
> He covers his failures with action. When in trouble in one field, divert attention to another. . .change the question and dominate the news.[59]

A survey of political writers taken by James Perry revealed that only four of 44 respondents questioned had words for the President that could be considered flattering or favorable by early 1972.[60]

Between Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve, the President demonstrated his philosophy of deeds speaking louder than words: Nixon appealed first for human peace

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[59]Ibid., December 31, 1971, p. 19.

[60]Perry, Us and Them, p. 215.

and dignity, and then ordered the heaviest bombing of North Vietnam in more than three years.[61]

Three months were to pass before the President's first press conference of campaign-year 1972. The President announced his trip to China, during that untelevised press conference of February 10. The President was asked why he did not hold more news conferences--the reporter noting that eight months had elapsed since the last televised conference. The President said he would hold press conferences whenever they were in the public interest. He noted as in the past, the types of press conferences he held, ranging from "one on one" to small forum conferences including impromptu ones. He concluded by saying he noted commentator "eyebrow-raising" as to why he had been on television so much:

> Let me say, I think television has probably had as much of the President as it wants at this point, and that is why you are getting this kind of conference.[62]

Seven speeches and four presidential press conferences were televised in 1971.[63]

The President also made a point regarding

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[61]New York Times, December 31, 1971, p. 19.

[62]Ibid., February 11, 1972, p. 161.

[63]New York Times Index, 1971, (New York, 1972), Volumes 61-62, passim.

South Vietnam's President Thieu. Nixon, contrary to his earlier stated beliefs of not conducting foreign policy by press conference said that he hoped his comments would reassure Mr. Thieu regarding a point in U.S. foreign policy. In another question, the President referred to the press sarcastically noting he only had one speech in 1968, saying, ". . .that is what you wrote anyway."[64]

During an impromptu news conference in March, the President chided the press, mildly, hoping the reporters would report International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation growth under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, because he had not "seen that in many stories." Nixon said he did not view his Presidential press conferences as a proper forum for partisan political matters, ". . .until after the Republican Convention."[65] On two other instances, the President was complimentary to the press. Once, for "a very thoughtful series" dealing with compensatory education, and again for pressing on political contributions, a matter that was of "very great interest in the Senate and in the nation."[66]

(Prevailing administration attitudes toward the press were revealed later in Senate Watergate Committee hearings

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[64]New York Times, February 11, 1972, p. 16.

[65]Public Papers, 1972, p. 493.

[66]New York Times, March 25, 1972, p. 12.

disclosing that on June 6, 1972, Buchanan wrote John Mitchell suggesting the press be used to point out that some of McGovern's "ambitious children" were busy stealing Wallace delegates to the coming convention. He suggested the press be used to accuse the Democratic Convention of "shafting a legitimate popular winner and stealing the delegates of a bedridden martyr.")[67]

Max Frankel, a few months later, wrote that the Presidential press conference was dying. Frankel wrote in the New York Times that there was no chance to question the President in reference to important events including the India/Pakistan war, Jimmy Hoffa, budget deficits, and so forth. The columnist made a key point when he noted the President was not shy of public appearances, but that he liked to appeal over the heads of the press directly to the people. Frankel contended that it was not an event that was lapsing, "but a whole process of communication."[68]

(On June 17, 1972, the Watergate break in occurred.)[69]

On June 22, 1972, President Nixon said: ". . .the White House has had no involvement whatever in this

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[67] Variety, October 17, 1973, p. 24.

[68] New York Times, January 19, 1972, p. 12.

[69] New York Times Magazine, July 22, 1973, pp. 35-37.

particular incident."[70] That date marked President Nixon's first press conference in over three months. The conference was impromptu, not televised, and reporters were limited to domestic issues in their questions. About one-third of the questions were follow-up. The first question dealt with Watergate, and the President made his denial of any involvement. Another question concerned itself with Presidential Adviser John Ehrlichman's statement that the press was asking "dumb and flabby questions" at news conferences. The President responded:

> You are not dumb and flabby. No, I noted that comment and expected a question on it. I am afraid if I begin to characterize the questions you will begin to characterize my answers, but you probably will anyway. In any event, as far as questions are concerned, I think what Mr. Ehrlichman was referring to was the tendency in the big East Room conferences for questions to come in from all over the place and [sic] no follow-up, as there can be in a conference like this.
>
> Sometimes the questions may appear somewhat less relevant. I have found, for example, although we do not rule out the big conference where everybody gets to come, I have found that these smaller sessions do provide an opportunity for members of the regular White House press who study these issues day by day and who know. . . what is relevant and what is not. . .I think that the possibility of dumb and flabby questions is much less and I don't frankly, complain about it.

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[70] Perry, Us and Them, p. 214.

> The other point that I should make is this: In [sic] looking over the transcripts of various press conferences, I have not seen many softballs and I don't want any because it is only the hardball that you can hit or strike out on.71

Typical of the President's spurts in news conference timing, and probably influenced by the coming national elections, the next conference came a few days later. It was the first televised news conference in more than a year. Frank Cormier (Associated Press) began the session by stating that he did not want to ask a "dumb or flabby" question and was followed by more sarcasm from Dan Rather, (CBS) and a second "dumb and flabby" question barb by an unidentified reporter. The President noted in response to a question regarding a coalition government in Saigon that he did not think it would be particularly helpful in a news conference to talk about forthcoming negotiations. Once again, the President was asked for an explanation of the infrequency of televised press conferences. The President responded, as he had in the past, that he used the press conference when he believed it the best way to communicate with the American people. He noted a differentiation in that answer, between using the press conference and using the reporters

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71New York Times, January 23, 1972, p. 14.

to communicate. Nixon said that during "sensitive periods" the press conference ". . .was not useful for the President of the United States to engage in." He denied trying to downgrade the press conference, saying he was more concerned with doing a good job, "Now if I do a good job, the fact that I get a bad press isn't going to matter. If I do a bad job, a good press isn't going to help." The President noted that in the forthcoming elections he would be judged by the job he had done, and not the number of press conferences he had held. Nixon reflected part of his press conference philosophy, making no mention of feedback, by concluding;

> . . .[I]t is essential for a President to communicate with the people, to inform the press, who, of course, do talk to the people, either on television, radio, as through what they write, and I will perhaps in the future, [sic] we can avoid the feeling that the President is antagonistic to them. I can't say whether the President thinks the press is antagonistic to him. But that's another matter.72

The President's news conference of July 27 was a televised 39-minute session. He received several foreign and domestic questions, chief among them being the subject of the bombing of North Vietnam. There were no questions dealing with Watergate.[73]

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[72]Ibid., January 30, 1972, pp. 2-3.

[73]Ibid., July 28, 1972, p. 10.

President Nixon's "political" press conference was held on August 29, 1972, at San Clemente. It was the only news conference during that election year where he overtly allowed questions dealing with the election to be asked and answered. Reminiscent of Calvin Coolidge, the President noted during the meeting that ". . .when a President speaks. . .he makes policy every time he opens his mouth."[74] John Osborne noted in The Fourth Year of the Nixon Watch, that the President had "mesmerized" the press during an answer dealing with campaign funds. Osborne noted the case as one example of how the press failed to follow through on a poorly answered question by the President.[75] In another answer the President, commenting on Watergate, lied, saying Presidential Counsel John Dean had conducted a "complete investigation" for the White House which enabled the President to declare: "I can state categorically that no one in the White House staff, no [sic] in this Administration, presently employed, was involved in this very bizarre incident." Dean later testified before the Senate Watergate Committee that there never was a

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[74]Ibid. August 30, 1972, p. 20.

[75]Osborne, Fourth Year of the Nixon Watch, pp. 136-40.

"Dean Report", that he never made the investigation referred to by the President.[76] In fact, the President had suggested to Dean that he prepare a report that would appear complete, but which would be "very incomplete," during a telephone conversation with Dean on March 20, 1973.[77] Watergate "deeds" and Watergate "words" sounded much like Nixon's press conference philosophy of foreign policy as expressed in his January and March 1969 news conferences. In those meetings, he noted the value of action rather than words in international relations.

The final Presidential press conference of 1972 occurred on October 5. During that conference the by-then-standard question was asked about Presidential isolation and infrequency of press conferences. Echoing past answers to the question, Nixon noted various other modes of communication, including statements made by subordinates in his name to the people, that he used in lieu of the press conference. He said he viewed press conferences not as a "chore," but a challenge.

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[76] National Observer, July 20, 1974, p. 12; Hays Gorey, "Dean's Dilemma," Harpers, October, 1974, pp. 63-65.

[77] The White House Transcripts, (New York, 1974), pp. 130-31. As this research is being completed, other instances of possible Nixon press conference lies are being disclosed by Watergate coverup trials. See Wisconsin State Journal, November 19, 1974, p. 2.

President Nixon was selective during criticism of the press by differentiating between reporters and commentators:

> . . .[O]n May 1st, that weekend, all [critics] had reached the conclusion that South Vietnam was down the tube. Time, Newsweek, The New York Times, The Washington Post, the three television network commentators--I am not referring to you, ladies and gentlemen, who are reporters--all in varying degrees wrote and spoke of the specter of defeat and the hopelessness of the South Vietnamese cause.78

President Nixon's statement was reminiscent of the tactic used by Franklin Roosevelt in blaming publishers and editors for press coverage he did not like.

William V. Shannon, however, in commentary for the New York Times wrote, the day following the press conference, that Nixon's complaint with the press was different from most politicians. Shannon said that Nixon had little difficulty with the publishers, that it was (italics mine) the reporters, the "natural skeptics" that caused the President to face "awkward issues." Shannon compared the President's tactic with the press to that of some corporation executives who use a public relations advisor to shield them from the media. He noted that Nixon had come as close to abolishing personal contact with the press as was possible, pointing out the relatively small number of press conferences held

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78New York Times, October 6, 1972, p. 43.

by the President in comparison to his predecessors. Shannon wrote that he believed the President regarded the news conference as a confrontation with his adversaries, and had little capacity for self-criticism, and consequently shielded himself from the press.[79]

Indeed, Cassie Mackin, subsequently "exiled" to the West Coast, had reported the Presidential closed audience campaign on September 28 on the NBC Nightly News.[80] Following complaints voiced by Herbert Klein, White House communication director, the Mackin reports were stopped. Mackin was later transferred to Los Angeles as NBC News correspondent, a position she held until January 1974, when she was returned to Washington as NBC Congressional correspondent.[81] Perry, in Us and Them, described how reporters were kept isolated during the Nixon/Agnew fund raising dinners in New York and Chicago earlier, during May 1971, noting that correspondents had to watch the proceedings on television from anterooms adjacent to where the President was speaking. Perry made the comparison to the use of surrogates during October 1972 in Atlanta during the

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[79] Ibid.

[80] Perry, Us and Them, pp. 238-39.

[81] Gordon L. Weil, The Long Shot, George McGovern Runs for President, (New York, 1973), p. 230; Crouse, The Boys on the Bus, pp. 265-67; New York Times, January 18, 1974, p. 67.

Nixon campaign against McGovern. Interestingly, the great majority (over 90 per cent) of newspapers backed Nixon.[82] An Editor & Publisher survey made this clear.[83]

Lyndon Johnson's one-time press secretary, Bill Moyers, commenting on the isolation strategy, called it the "triumph of bureaucracy, not democracy." He warned that a government isolated "from the nerve ends of society becomes autocratic or paralyzed." He urged the President to return to an open Presidency.[84]

Expressing his views on interplay with the Fourth Estate during the third year of his Presidency, Nixon had said:

> I respect the individual members of the press--some of them, particularly the older ones, who have some standards of objectivity and fairness. And the individual competence of many of the younger ones, I respect that too, though nowadays they don't care about fairness, it's the 'in' thing to forget objectivity and let your prejudices show. You can see that in my press conferences all the time. You read the Kennedy press conferences and see how soft and gentle they were with him, and then you read mine. I never get any easy questions--and I don't want any.[85]

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[82] Perry, Us and Them, pp. 230-41.

[83] New York Times, October 6, 1972, p. 28.

[84] Bill Moyers, "Losing the President in the Presidency," Newsweek, November 6, 1972, p. 23.

[85] Small, Political Power and the Press, p. 400.

By the end of his first term as President, Richard Nixon's views of the news conference had become clear. He repeatedly voiced a belief that actions, not words in a question-and-answer session, would be his final vindication. More, he expressed the view that his news conferences were but one of several modes for communicating his policies to the American people. Finally, he viewed the media as his adversary and made his feelings clear in several press conferences. Singling out media enemies, Nixon confined himself to publishers, editors and commentators, despite the fact that a great majority of newspapers were to back him in his 1972 bid for the presidency.

Seen in the last chapter was the fact that Nixon's overall use of press conferences was less than any modern American president. He steadily diminished televised press conferences during his first administration, although he held about half of them during prime-time viewing hours. Nixon complemented his first-term press conferences with "conversations" when media criticism of his insularity grew. Using his news meetings to proclaim the right of press criticism of his administration --and singling out individual members of the press corps for praise--he clandestinely used subordinates to manipulate and attack the press. Those assaults were carried out with fabricated independence from

Nixon's direction. The tack appeared to be one of seeking praise for Nixon, a President defending reportorial rights, battling as an underdog in the "Tijuana bullpit" of his Presidential news conferences.

His views and subsequent uses of the press meetings contributed to abrasion with the media. The adversary relationship between Nixon and the press was extended to depth criticism of his press relations--largely by commentators and columnists--by the end of 1972. The seeds had been planted for a Nixon-media distrust that would grow with the Watergate scandal.

CHAPTER IV

PRESIDENT NIXON'S PRESS CONFERENCES: SECOND TERM

> There is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known.
>
> Be not deceived; God is not mocked: For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.
>
> --Bible

A sequestered Watergate jury watched President Nixon's Inaugural parade on television on January 20, 1973. The criminal trial had opened a scant two weeks before the President began his second term in office. A Gallup poll taken the weekend following the Inauguration and an announcement of a peace settlement in Vietnam had put the President's popularity at 68 per cent, matching his previous high point in November 1969, when he announced his plan for the "Vietnamization" of the War.[1]

The media as a whole had virtually slept through Watergate--until the election was over. Ben Bagdikian

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[1] White House Transcripts, pp. 834-37.

surveyed 433 reporters employed by the 16 largest bureaus in Washington and found Watergate coverage lacking:

> The papers as a group, whether or not they endorsed Nixon, had a poor record of use and display of [Watergate] stories--major events in the most ominous episode of high-level dirty politics in our history, occurring at a crucial time of national decision-making.2

Indeed, only one of the three major TV networks (CBS) had logged over one hour air time reporting on Watergate between September 14, 1972, to election day. The other two networks had devoted only about 41 minutes to the subject.[3]

In fact, the first press conference of President Nixon's second term contained no Watergate questions. It was held on January 31, called with only a half-hour's notice. The questions largely centered around Henry Kissinger's forthcoming trip to Hanoi. The President broke with his past tact of blaming columnists for his criticism when he responded to a reporter's question of amnesty for draft evaders:

> I know it gags some of you to write that phrase, [". . .we. . .have achieved a peace with honor."] but it is true, and most Americans realize it is true. . . .

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[2]Perry, Us and Them, p. 236.

[3]Emery, Readings in Mass Communication, p. 395.

> Many Americans paid a very high price to serve their country, some with their lives, some as prisoners of war. . .serving in a country far away in a war that they realize had very little support among the so-called better people, in the media and the intellectual circles . . .but which fortunately did have the support among a majority of the American people, who some way, despite the fact that they were hammered night after night, and day after day, with the fact that this was an immoral war, that America should not be there, that they should not serve their country, that morally what they should do was desert their country.[4]

Later, in the same meeting, the President answered a question asked by Clark Mollenhoff, Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter who had resigned in 1970 as President Nixon's private investigator.[5] Mollenhoff's question dealt with the use of executive privilege, and the President seemed to distinguish between "good" and "bad" reporters in his answer:

> . . .I perhaps have not been as precise as I should have been. And I think yours is a very legitimate question because you have been one who has not had a double-standard on this.
>
> But I would rather. . .not. . .have just an off-the-top of my head press conference statement delineate what executive privilege will be.[6]

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[4]New York Times, February 1, 1973, p. 20.

[5]Joyce Illig, "Mollenhoff: 'Mr. President!'," Intellectual Digest, April, 1974, p. 6.

[6]New York Times, February 1, 1973, p. 20.

Mollenhoff would repeat the question louder, again in late October, with a less patronizing response. In that first news conference of 1973, the President changed his approach from the past Franklin Roosevelt tack of blaming press executives for "bad news," moving down a rung on the hierarchical ladder to some of the reporters.

(On April 30, 1973, President Nixon praised "a vigorous free press" for its role in exposing the Watergate scandal. On that same day he announced the resignations of Haldeman, Ehrlichman, and Kleindienst. He fired his counsel, John W. Dean III.)[7]

President Nixon's next press conference, again called on short notice, reflected growing press concern for Watergate. There were only two Watergate-oriented questions--in answering one Nixon said he had granted his counsel, John Dean, executive privilege--at that conference, but they were to grow in number. In the single question eliciting a Presidential view of the press, Nixon said:

> [Noting press speculation]. . .I know in some of the press and particularly the black press. . .that because I did not get a substantial number of black votes. . .we don't owe anything to them.

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[7]Perry, Us and Them, p. 238.

The comment demonstrated but another instance of Presidential news conference comment attacking press inaccuracy. (The President denied the black press speculation as being untrue.)[8]

The number of Watergate questions increased to seven in his March 15 press conference, the third one that year called on short notice. The President opened the meeting with a statement announcing the opening of the United States Liaison Office in Peking, calling it, ". . .a journey. . .in which the most populous nation in the world and the United States of America can work together. . . ."[9] His opening statement notwithstanding, press questioning turned immediately to Watergate. Nixon answered a question by referring to the Watergate break in as, "espionage by one political organization against another," a change from previous White characterizations of the crime as men acting independently.[10]

After the March 15 news conference there were no more until August 22, 1973. The five-month one-week

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[8]New York Times, March 3, 1973, p. 12.

[9]Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, (Washington, D.C., 1973), January-March, 1973, p. 271. Hereafter cited as Presidential Documents.

[10]White House Transcripts, p. 840.

silence, during the summer of the Senate Watergate hearings, was the longest press conference gap in the history of the scheduled presidential press conference. President Eisenhower had a space of five months and four days of silence from August 4, 1955, to January 8, 1956, during his period of recovery from a heart attack.[11] President Hoover held no press conferences during the last four months of his Presidency.[12] The San Clemente news conference in August also ended a span of nearly 14 months since the last televised press conference.[13]

Former Presidential Press Secretary George E. Christian criticized the inactivity:

> . . .President Nixon had too few press conferences. By the time he got around to holding one so many questions had built up--along with animosities--that his conference would be more of a confrontation than a means of informing the people.[14]

The President opened his August press conference with a statement announcing the resignation of Secretary of State Rogers. The President made his remarks for the

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[11]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, Truman to Johnson, pp. 80-81.

[12]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, p. 768.

[13]New York Times, August 23, 1973, pp. 28-29.

[14]George E. Christian, Letter to Author, October 28, 1974.

first time behind a rostrum. The New York Times described the President as "clearly nervous at times." (Only two days before the nation had viewed an emotional outburst by Nixon when, in full view of CBS television cameras, he angrily shoved his press secretary, Ronald Ziegler.)[15]

The news conference, save two questions dealing with Vice-President Agnew's difficulties and a question alleging a cover-up on Cambodia operations, was focused on Watergate. The five-month news conference moratorium had heightened interest, not silenced the subject. The meeting lasted for 50 minutes, about 20 minutes longer than the usual Nixon news conference. In partial answer to a reporter's question, the President noted that the press could ". . .attach anything you want [to his comments regarding the Ellsberg break in] to it. I hope you will be just as fair and objective as I try to be in giving you the answer." The President took a question asking if Agnew should resign as ". . .one that any good newsman. . .would ask." In another question regarding the Vice-President, Nixon noted press speculation on the subject of his confidence in Agnew. He attacked information leaks in the Agnew case:

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[15]Aaron Latham, "The Reporter the President Hates," New York Magazine, January 21, 1974, p. 34.

> . . .[T]he leak of information with regard to charges that have been made against the Vice-President, and leaking them all in the press, convicting an individual, not only trying him but convicting him in the headlines and on television before he's had a chance to present his case in court is completely contrary to the American tradition.

The President, including his one-time ally--television--in his criticism, noted that only when a case got to open court did the press have the right to give it broad coverage. The President was asked about his thoughts on resigning, and pursued his criticism of TV:

> . . .[I]t is true that as far as the capacity to govern is concerned, that to be under a constant barrage--12 to 15 minutes a night on each of the three major networks for four months--tends to raise some questions in the people's minds with regard to the President. . . .

Near the end of the meeting, the President temporarily extended his belief to include <u>most</u> members of the press as his adversaries. He replied to a question dealing with exploiters of Watergate:

> I would think that some political figures, some members of the press perhaps, some members of the television, perhaps would exploit it. I don't impute, interestingly enough, motives, however. . . .
>
> . . .I know that most of the members of the press corps were not enthusiastic [about his mandate] . . .And I understand that about

> either my election in '68 or '72. That's not unusual. Frankly, if I had always followed what the press predicted or the polls predicted, I would have never been elected President.
>
> And so I say I have no improper motives to them. I think they would prefer that I failed. On the other hand, I'm not going to fail. I'm here to do. . .the best I can, and I'm sure the fair-minded members of this press corps, and that's most of you, will report when I do well, and I'm sure you'll report when I do badly.16

The President announced during that meeting he had turned from Watergate, which was "water under the bridge," to the "people's business." He accepted all the blame for the circumstances that produced the break in.[17]

Typical of spurts in the Presidential news conference habit during times of crisis--an earlier rash occurred immediately after the burglary in Election Year 1972--the next meeting with the press followed rather quickly, on September 5. That news conference was televised from the East Room of the White House, where most Nixon press conferences were held. The President began the meeting with a lengthy statement chiding Congress for failing to act in areas such as national defense, energy, and domestic problems, saying it was time to turn to

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[16] New York Times, August 23, 1973, pp. 28-29.

[17] White House Transcripts, p. 860.

initiatives in the "interests of all the people."[18] Reporters, however, continued to pursue Watergate. Half of the conference contained Watergate-related questions. At one point, the President noted that he did not resent questions dealing with his property and finances, saying that the field of his property was public knowledge. The President reaffirmed his belief in the power of his actions over the reported word when answering a question regarding rebuilding of confidence in his administration:

> It's rather difficult to have the President of the United States on prime time television. . . for four months to have the President of the United States by innuendo, by leak, by, frankly, leers and sneers of commentators--which is their perfect right--attacked in every way without having some. . .confidence being worn away.
>
> Now how is it restored? Well it's restored by the President not allowing his own confidence to be destroyed.
>
> Second, it's restored by doing something. We have tried to do things. The country hasn't paid a great deal of attention to it. And I may say the media hasn't paid a great deal of attention to it, because your attention, quite understandably, is in the more fascinating area of Watergate.
>
> But as we move into [foreign and domestic areas of importance]. . .the people will be concerned about what the President does. And I think that will restore the confidence.

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[18] Presidential Documents, July-September, 1973, pp. 1049-51.

> What the President says will not restore it. And what you ladies and gentlemen say will certainly not restore it.[19]

The President's inclusion of all reporters as his press adversaries occurred in his comments at his 37th press conference, on October 3, 1973, the third meeting with the press in six weeks. During his opening statement the President announced that Secretary of State Kissinger was to visit Peking again. About half the questions were concerned with Watergate and Agnew. In answer to one question, the President reaffirmed that he did not desire Vice-President Agnew's resignation. In answer to the fourth question of the news conference he said, in part:

> . . .I think full statements [regarding his San Clemente property] have been made over and over again on this and I really think anything I would say in answer to your question in view of the way you have already presented it as a statement, would not convince you or anybody else.

Presidential temper rose a few questions later, when Mr. Nixon answered a follow-up question from Eugene Risher (UPI) dealing with the Vice-President:

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[19]New York Times, September 6, 1973, pp. 26-27.

> I would say further in that respect that I would hope that in this rather white-hot atmosphere--which I understand has developed since the Vice-President's case came to public attention--that he will not be tried and convicted in the press and on television by leaks and innuendo and the rest.
>
> There is nothing really that is more harmful to [individual rights] than to be tried and convicted in the press before he has an opportunity to present his case. And I would urge all of you ladies and gentlemen, because I know you want to be responsible in this respect--[An interruption occurred.]
>
> Let me finish. Make your judgement on the basis of all the evidence, and not simply on the basis of a [sic] unilateral charge that is made not [sic] under oath.20

At the end of the press conference, the President made a comment regarding the press, calling it the most independent breed of human species. The strained relationship and the "white-hot" atmosphere existing between the President and the press for the past three news conferences was apparent, however. The press had a grip on his Vice-President and on Watergate that other foreign and domestic Presidential actions could not break.

The two combatants met again on October 26 at the White House. The New York Times noted that the President displayed fatigue, and that his voice displayed

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[20]Ibid., October 3, 1973, p. 30.

occasional hurt and anger.[21]

(Vice-President Agnew had resigned in disgrace on October 10.)[22]

(At 8:24 p.m. on October 20, the President had dismissed Watergate Prosecutor Archibald Cox, accepted the resignation of Attorney General Elliot Richardson, and dismissed Deputy Attorney General William Ruckelshaus in what the press dubbed "The Saturday Night Massacre.")[23]

(During the night of October 25, the President ordered all U.S. military units--throughout the world--on stand-by alert.)[24]

The President opened that twice-postponed press conference with a lengthy statement on the Mid-East alert. The fourth question of the news conference was by CBS White House Correspondent Dan Rather, who asked about the President's thoughts concerning resignation or impeachment. The President quipped he was glad an impeachment vote was not taken in the news conference room. Then the President said in part:

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[21]New York Times, October 27, 1973, p. 14.

[22]Ibid., October 23, 1973, p. 1.

[23]Ibid., October 21, 1973, p. 1.

[24]"Seven Tumultuous Days," Time, November 5, 1973, p. 21.

> . . .[W]hen I made the. . .most difficult decision of my first term [the bombing of North Vietnam]. . .that exactly the same words were used on the networks--I don't mean by you, but they were quoted on the networks--that were used now--tyrant, dictator, he's lost his senses, he should resign, he should be impeached.
>
> . . .It was a hard decision and it was one that many of my friends in the press who had consistently supported me on the war up to that time disagreed with.
>
> . . .The events of this past week I know, for example, in your head office in New York some thought it was simply a blown-up exercise, there wasn't a real crisis [sic].

In partial answer to another Watergate question, the President shifted his attack target from the "head office" to the reporters and the electronic media:

> I have noted a lot [of criticism] on the networks particularly and sometimes even in the newspapers. . . .
>
> The difference now from what it was. . . 25 years ago is the electronic media. I have never heard or seen such outrageous, vicious, distorted reporting in 27 years of public life. I'm not blaming anybody for that. Perhaps. . .what we did brought it about, and therefore the media decided they would have to take that particular line.
>
> But when the people are pounded night after night with that kind of frantic, hysterical reporting, it naturally shakes their confidence.
>
> . . .and I can assure you that whatever shocks gentlemen of the press may have--

these shocks will not affect me and my doing my job.25

Requests by the National News Council for specific documentation of the President's charge of "outrageous, vicious, distorted" reporting were unanswered until March 1974. Bruce Herschensohn, deputy special assistant to the President, said then that specific criticism of alleged news "distortion" was in the following categories:

(1) The failure of CBS to report as a lead the January 18, Middle East settlement.

(2) CBS's calling a documentary on the Middle East alert in October "The Mysterious Alert," implying something strange about the controversial operation.

(3) Use of a hold-frame audiovisual technique of freezing various administration people by CBS news during the early days of the Watergate story, a technique associated with Jack Ruby killing Lee Harvey Oswald.

(4) Use of the term "The Saturday Night Massacre," when referring to the October 22 firing of Cox and resignations of Richardson and Rockelshaus.

(5) Use of the term "Operation Candor" by the Washington Post.

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[25]New York Times, October 27, 1973, p. 14.

Herschensohn named CBS news as the most biased news agency because "Walter Cronkite's own philosophy comes across--he's too one-sided." He described ABC anchormen Harry Reasoner and Howard K. Smith as "not as much of a problem" as Cronkite. CBS Vice-President and Director of News William Small dismissed the criticism of CBS, saying it was simply because "we're the number one news network."[26]

A national public opinion poll commissioned by CBS and conducted between November 15-18 by Opinion Research, Inc. (Princeton, New Jersey), found that 57 per cent of the persons polled did not agree with Nixon's accusation of "outrageous, vicious, distorted reporting . . . ." Seventy-six per cent believed newsmen should ask tough, probing questions at presidential press conferences.[27]

In that same October news conference Nixon answered a question on the credibility of campaign funds with the comment, "Well, it's obviously not credible to you. . . ." in responding to the reporter, James Deakin of the

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[26]Ibid., March 27, 1974, p. 74; "Buchanan Suggests Sponsors Lean on Networks to End Liberal Bias," Broadcasting, April 1, 1974, p. 36.

[27]"More People Believe Network News than Believe Nixon," Broadcasting, November 26, 1974, p. 21.

St. Louis Post-Dispatch. Answering a question by Jerald terHorst, Detroit News, the President noted Presidential honesty questioned with his friend Charles G. Rebozo being attacked by the media over a Howard Hughes million-dollar campaign contribution. ". . .[D]espite the fact those who printed it and those who said it knew it was untrue. . .," Nixon said that one of the networks ran allegations, knowing they were untrue. The fourteenth questioner noted that the President had first "lambasted" the television networks and then said he did not blame anyone. The reporter, Robert Pierpoint of CBS News, who 10 days earlier had done a special report on Rebozo, asked what television had done to arouse the President's anger. President Nixon answered ". . .one can only be angry with those he respects." Reporters moaned audibly at that answer. In the next question, Nixon redefined his lack of respect:

> . . .Let me say too I didn't want to leave an impression with my good friends from C.B.S. over here that I don't respect the reporters. What I was simply saying was this: That [sic] when a commentator takes a bit of news and then with knowledge of what the facts are distorts it viciously, I have no respect for that individual.

Clark Mollenhoff shouted for the last question of the news conference. Mollenhoff, as he had in an

earlier press conference, asked about executive privilege. The President's answer was not as gracious as it had been in January that year. He began his answer by saying:

> Well, I should point out that perhaps all the other reporters in the room are aware of the fact we have waived executive privilege. . . .28

Thus, at the end of his 38th Presidential press conference, Nixon had made it clear that his anger was directed at certain reporters and television. The CBS "head office" and Walter Cronkite, were apparently his most specific adversaries. During a period of anger the President had, however, aimed his attacks at what appeared to be all reporting. He had quickly explained that he blamed no one, but the connotation of his remarks leads one to suspect that his true feelings had been vented during that abrasive news conference. Jules Witcover believed the bitterness in the President's answers revealed the deep-seated animosity that went back to Nixon's early years in public life. As candidate and office holder Nixon had treated the press, wrote Witcover, as a hostile and dangerous force to be neutralized or, if possible, undermined. "Agnewism" was noted as one tactic in undermining the press.[29]

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[28]New York Times, October 27, 1973, p. 14.

[29]Washington Post, March 25, 1974, p. 20.

Lou Cannon of the Washington Post agreed, saying that Nixon's "controlled fury" over the questioning of his credibility was reminiscent of the President's "last press conference" in 1962. Cannon pointed to the fact that Nixon had answered several questions referring to himself in the third person, a habit of Lyndon Johnson in his later press conferences. Cannon noted that the President had compared his Watergate critics to his foreign adversaries.[30]

In a poll conducted before that conference, during the weekend of October 19-22, a Gallup rating showed for the first time that more people favored impeaching the President than believed he was doing a good job in office. It showed Nixon's popularity had fallen, with only 29 per cent approving of the way he was doing his job.[31]

The last press meeting of 1973--held on November 17--took place at Disney World, Florida, before about 400 members of the Associated Press Managing Editor's Annual Convention. It was Nixon's longest Presidential news conference, lasting slightly over 60 minutes. In a brief opening statement, Nixon quipped about the "tough questions" he expected from managing editors, implying

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[30]Milwaukee Journal, October 27, 1973, p. 1.

[31]Ibid., November 27, 1973, p. 1.

that press conference would be more difficult than those of the past, when he had faced the White House press corps. ABC News Correspondent David Schoumacher, however, reported most of the A.P.M.E. questions were not tough, and noted the White House press was "muzzled," sequestered from the editors and their wives.[32] The President re-emphasized his previous news conference point that the place to convict a person was in the courts and not in the media when he answered one question. Later, the President made a slur against publishers, jokingly implying that they were especially knowledgeable in gimmicks for income tax deductions. He turned to a question of his taxes with a polite comment that he had noted editorials questioning his income-tax payments. Nixon explained his finances in great detail--down to a 1958 Oldsmobile. He noted that retractions of an alleged one-million dollar campaign fund question were not given as broad coverage on TV as in the newspapers. In response to another question the President indicated he approved of a shield law for reporters, but was not specific on details of the provisions of the law. The President seemed to take a final jab at television, answering a pre-planned question on a milk fund, when he ran over the alloted hour time limit, into a station break. He said, "It's a lousy

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[32] Broadcasting, November 26, 1973, p. 22.

movie anyway tonight." The President's primarily Republican audience did not appear to throw the hard balls of the normal press conference--one editor asked the President his plans for retirement. The meeting had very similar appearances to his 1952 "Checkers" speech: ". . .this is just before I went into the service, I was waiting for my service call. . .I had worked in a service station. . . ."

By earlier press conference standards, the President's answers were lengthy--he only answered 18 questions--about the same number he had handled in other half-hour meetings with the press. He used the technique of "planting a lead" at one point saying, ". . .I am not a crook."[33]

(Four days later an 18-minute gap on one of the Presidential tapes was made public.)[34]

Over three months passed before Nixon's first press meeting of 1974, held on February 25, and televised from the East Room of the White House. Despite a lengthy opening statement dealing with the energy crisis, White House press regulars turned about half the questions back to Watergate. The President used a rostrum and was described

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[33]New York Times, November 18, 1973, pp. 62-63.

[34]White House Transcripts, p. 868.

by the New York Times as being notably nervous at the outset of the news conference.[35]

In opening a White House press conference on March 6, 1974, the President commended Helen Thomas for being the first female White House bureau chief for United Press International. Thomas responded by throwing the President a hard ball concerning hush money. A newsman asked if the fact that the President had called a news conference in such quick succession to his first of the year--eight days--signalled the start of a new policy. Nixon avoided the question by answering a second part of the reporter's query, saying in part that he believed all political candidates should have a right to defend themselves against false charges made during a campaign whether by their opponents, or by the press. The President began the answer to a double-barreled question by quipping he had also quit beating his wife. In the final question dealing with Presidential sentiments toward the press, in that meeting, the President said that his three ex-aides, Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Colson had been convicted in the press, "--over and over again--."[36]

(A week later Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Colson were

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[35]New York Times, February 26, 1974, p. 22.

[36]Ibid., March 7, 1974, p. 32.

indicted by a grand jury for conspiring to hinder the investigation of the burglary at the Watergate in June 1972.)[37]

On March 15, the President held a television question-and-answer session in Chicago before the Executive Club of Chicago, an organization of business and professional leaders. The March 15 questions and answers fall outside the definition of a presidential news conference in this paper. Victor Gold, Agnew's former press secretary, called the session one of carrying the news conference concept to a "show biz" extreme by avoiding confrontations with the press.[38] No reporters asked questions. The session was notable for soft questions--". . .[W]ould you encourage young people to get into politics. . .?" and a partisan atmosphere,"--[I]n my district you're thought of belovedly by thousands of people. . . ." One member of the audience was jeered when he asked about Presidential resignation. In answer to one question, the President said he believed Watergate had been over-publicized, and in answer to another question, replied he did not have adequate time, during that session to respond to recent articles in The Wall Street Journal and the Chicago

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[37] White House Transcripts, p. 874.

[38] New York Times, March 25, 1974, p. 17.

Sun Times concerning the deterioration of foreign policy.[39]

(A Harris Poll in March 1974, showed Nixon's overall job rating stood at only 26 per cent positive, an all-time low at that point.)[40]

Continuing a spurt of public appearances, Nixon's last Presidential news conference, the fourth televised question-and-answer session in three weeks, occurred on March 19 at eight p.m.--prime time--in Houston, Texas. The President spoke before the National Association of Broadcasters and answered questions from six White House correspondents who joined news directors in a panel seated on an auditorium stage. The President, answering one question concerning his increasing accessibility, responded as he had many times in the past that ". . . there were times when news conferences weer [sic] not called for. . ." but said he hoped to continue to hold them frequently. In another question concerning his treatment by the press, the President admitted to an "adversary relationship" between presidents and the press, and said the press had the right to criticize a president. He sugggested a "Golden Rule" approach to the problem saying, "The President should treat the press just as

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[39]Ibid., March 16, 1974, p. 12.

[40]Wisconsin State Journal, August 1, 1974, p. 10.

fairly as the press treats him."[41]

An exchange with Dan Rather drew varying responses from the audience, and later editorialists, when the President asked Rather if the correspondent were running for office. Rather's reply, "No Mr. President, are you?" may have reflected the opinion of other observers that the 1974 press conferences were "show biz" or advertising approaches to public opinion, lacking important feedback from partisan audiences. The conferences had the appearance of an election campaign. Indeed, New York Times analyst Les Brown described the Chicago and Houston appearances as "game shows" where the more difficult or embarrassing the questions, the more courageous the President appeared, a fact underscored by the applause for the President's answers in Houston.[42]

Thus, after what has been described as an attempt at "re-election," the institutionalizing of an away-from-Washington question and answer session, President Nixon left the presidential press conference an abused shell in presidential communications history. Since assuming the Presidency in 1969, Nixon had struggled with--then retreated from--the glare and strain of pre-scheduled

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[41]New York Times, March 20, 1974, p. 29.

[42]Ibid., March 22, 1974, p. 71.

White House news conferences. The friendly audiences of the Disney World, Chicago and Houston "nonpress conferences," composed mainly of conservative businessmen, were quixotic efforts at best. At worst, they represented a bungling misreading of public opinion regarding the President and Watergate.

Anchorman Bob Schieffer, CBS, was to renounce them as "shows," disdaining the applause and spectators as "props." He noted they were part of a tactic to make Nixon appear to be under seige from the press.[43]

Columnist Norman Miller noted the meetings as part of a "calculated campaign" to portray Nixon's impeachment inquiry as being "partisanly motivated." He wrote that the apparent objective was to create an "underdog sympathy toward an embattled President; convey the impression that Congress is tied up in Watergate and 'out to get' the President; and divert the growing anxiety and distrust of the people away from the President and toward Congress."[44]

The President's espoused 1969 press conference philosophy of "deeds not words," had not been applied. The showmanship of his final press conferences could not

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[43]Bob Schieffer, Comments at University of Wisconsin, Madison, Seminar of June 26, 1974.

[44]Wall Street Journal, March 28, 1974, p. 14.

withstand the reality of Watergate.

(In April 1974, President Nixon was named an unindicted co-conspirator by the same grand jury that indicted seven of his aides for obstruction of justice.)

(In July the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that Nixon was to turn over tapes of Presidential conversations to the House Judiciary Committee.)

(On August 5, Nixon admitted he had withheld the contents of three June 1972 tapes that showed he sought to use the CIA to slow an FBI investigation of Watergate.)

(On August 8, Nixon resigned as President of the United States.)

Nixon's Presidency ended abruptly. Shockingly. The President held no news conferences during his last five months in office, coming within a few days of breaking his earlier record for the longest gap in presidential news conference history.

As Watergate unfolded in the summer hearings of 1973 the President's hatred of the media became apparent in his press conferences. His attacks were directed at nearly every reportorial level of the media and at almost all forms of reportage. Radio, his 1960 debate ally, was the only exception to his view of the media as an adversary--he never criticized radio in any of his press conferences. When the end came he viewed the rest of the press with hatred.

During that second term he used the press conference as an attempt to divert media preoccupation from Watergate. Conference opening statements were used frequently--a probable attempt to divert reporters' questions to foreign policy and other non-Watergate subjects. That effort was feeble, the press continued the attack. Nixonian press conferences were moved away from Washington--half were away from the White House--in what was perhaps an attempt to evade the liberal East Coast press. But San Clemente failed as a shield from the tough questions he espoused to welcome. That tack failing, Nixon turned to partisan audiences in what the press clumsily defined as a "P.R. Campaign". He used his government machinery to mislead and lie to the press while taking his case over their heads to the people in "non press conferences."

As the Fourth Estate attacked his obfuscation and as Watergate became an all-consuming crisis, Nixon stopped the news conferences altogether.

In the end Nixon's Watergate actions could not withstand the probing of a Presidential press conference.

CONCLUSION

> [Credibility is] restored by doing something. We have tried to do things. The country hasn't paid a great deal of attention to it. And I may say the media hasn't paid a great deal of attention to it, because your attention, quite understandably, is in the more fascinating area of Watergate.
>
> --Richard M. Nixon
> Presidential Press Conference
> September 1973

Editorialists and columnists have a tendency to be optimistic regarding press conferences early in presidential administrations. That propensity is understandable--most Americans want their president to do well. Yet the press conference tends to peter out late in presidential administrations.

President Ford is probably no exception to that rule. At this writing he has held less than a half-dozen news conferences, and they have been described as generally successful. He has, thus far, largely patterned them after Nixon's format, but has introduced some minor variations. Ford has moved the conferences to settings easily identifiable with the White House, an effort to get away from the staged effect of standing in front of curtains as had Nixon. The conferences have been scheduled during early afternoon viewing hours generally

impinging on "house-wife" time, though one was scheduled during a World Series play-off game. Seating charts for reporters remain much the same as during the Nixon administration with the first three rows reserved for the White House press corps. The press conferences have lasted about 30 minutes--a fairly established presidential norm, and the President relies somewhat on cue cards and notes, speaking from behind a small podium.

The fact that Nixon's assistant press secretary, Gerald Warren, coordinated the first press meeting with Ford's first press secretary, Jerald ter Horst, partially explains the similar Presidential formats.[1]

In his second press conference, Ford altered past presidential custom by allowing newsmen to remain standing as a signal they desired a follow-up question.[2] The practice is similar to one employed successfully in West German Parliamentary conferences. With that technique, about 40 per cent of the questions were follow-up, somewhat better than the press conference norm of

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[1]Carla Marie Rupp, "Ford Sticks to Old Format for First Press Conference," Editor & Publisher, August 31, 1974, p. 9.

[2]"Ford to Alter Format of News Conferences," Editor & Publisher, October 12, 1974, p. 13.

32 per cent found by McGuire in his study.[3] Despite improvement in the amount of follow-up questions, Editor & Publisher noted that in a "couple of situations" a debate began to take place between the President and a persistent reporter, and that fewer questions were asked. Assistant Press Secretary Larry Speakes, however, described the press corps reactions to the new format as "very good."[4]

In a less optimistic appraisal, however, the number of news meetings has only been about the same as those averaged by Nixon during his first six months in office--one a month. As this manuscript is being completed Ford is still in his first 100 days and his "honeymoon" with the press will probably erode if the history of most of his predecessors is repeated. Hopefully, Ford will not respond to any future adversary relationship with the media by boycotting press conferences.

Beyond the Ford administration one is tempted to speculate about future presidential press conference innovations. The advent of cable TV--with prototypes

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[3]Delbert McGuire, "Democracy's Confrontation: The Presidential Press Conference, II," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 45, No. 1, Spring, 1968, p. 36. Hereafter cited as McGuire, "Democracy's Confrontation, II."

[4]Luther A. Huston, "President Holds Press Conference in Rose Garden," Editor & Publisher, October 19, 1974, p. 13.

now working--introduces the capability of a completely new concept in two-way presidential communication. Cable TV will perhaps one day offer a greatly improved potential for public opinion monitoring in the United States. That potential, however, is beyond the scope of this research.

Here it is most relevant to suggest means of improving presidential press conferences in terms of present day realities.

Press conference problems were described earlier: they lack regularity, a president is not required to hold them, he is not forced to answer questions, a president may be used by grandstanding reporters, and problems of factual inaccuracies exist. Other complaints were noted: the meetings are too short, too noisy, filled with too many reporters, allow few follow-up questions, or simply allow too many "dumb and flabby" questions. "The strongest and most persistent argument against live TV conferences," said Pierre Salinger of his experience with Kennedy, "was that a single slip of the lip by an American President [sic] could push an already jittery world a little closer to disaster."[5] Salinger's successor, George Reedy, added to the list of problems by pointing out press conference infrequency and the ease with which presidents can

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[5]Salinger, With Kennedy, p. 54.

dominate them.[6]

Presidential "domination" is not hard to understand when one examines the methods available to a chief executive coupled with the aura of the office. David Wise lists among others: a simple "no comment" answer; using a reporter's question merely as a takeoff point for something he wishes to say; calling on friendly reporters with "puffball" questions; challenging the premise of the reporter's question; asking the reporter a question, or simply bawling the reporter out.[7]

How may they be improved?

Some have feared, and others have hoped, that they would be abolished or at least limited to written questions.[8] John Osborne has said that too few are worse than none at all. Osborne believes that hard work at reporting and careful research of texts of presidential statements, along with serious private questioning of a president may be an alternative to presidential press conferences.[9]

David Wise warns that because of press conference difficulties, presidents may resort to the use of more frequent "backgrounders." Wise, properly, criticizes that

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[6]New York Times, January 6, 1971, p. 37.

[7]Wise, Politics of Lying, pp. 468-69.

[8]"Dangerous Vacuum?," Time, December 26, 1955, p. 51.

[9]Osborne, Fourth Year of the Nixon Watch, pp. 153-57.

trend. He notes press conferences are extra-legal and a president is not required to hold them, but that custom has made the public expect them. He advocates, without elaboration, returning to more of the "traditional" press conferences.[10]

Pierre Salinger has suggested that the problem of presidential misstatement can best be corrected by simple presidential candor and advocates "one-subject" press conferences.[11]

A frequent suggestion noted for revitalizing presidential news conferences has been to resort to written questions. President Truman made that suggestion.[12] Indeed, the demise of twice-weekly press conferences began after the Roosevelt administration when FDR dropped the rule.

Arthur Krock once suggested reporters not resort to written questions, but allow editing of news conference transcripts before release to the press. He suggested the media insist on follow-up questions. Krock did not explain the place of live TV in his suggestion, however,

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[10]Wise, Politics of Lying, p. 515.

[11]New York Times, September 24, 1970, p. 47; McGuire, "Democracy's Confrontation, II," p. 40.

[12]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, Truman to Johnson, p. 58.

nor explain how follow-up questions may be insured.[13]

Most of these suggestions, while worthy of consideration either ignore human frailties or amount to "turning back the clock." They generally fail to come to realistic grips with specific contemporary problems in this writer's opinion. A notable exception is Pollard's idea of smaller news conference sessions.

James Pollard, concluding his two volume history of presidential press relations, suggested the meetings may be improved by holding smaller sessions, with efficient reporting, fewer "nit-picking" questions and less "hamming" by reporters.[14]

President Nixon tried smaller press meetings with mixed results. The very small ones--"conversations" with one to six commentators--tended to contain too many soft questions from a press viewpoint. The 30-40 newsperson conference, though more effective, raised the democratically difficult question of who was to attend, and who was to make attendance selection. (The usual answer to that problem, undemocratic but workable, was simply to call the conference on short notice and invite members of the media present in the White House West-Terrace Press Center at the time.)

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[13]Krock, Consent of the Governed, p. 241.

[14]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, Truman to Johnson, p. 110.

At the outset of this research that approach--press conferences with fewer reporters--seemed the simplest and most logical. Later, a more promising variation on the idea was found. It was offered by Edward Morgan and agreed to by Clark Mollenhoff and Peter Lisagor during the Rational Debate Seminar mentioned earlier. They called the proposed meeting a "fragmentary" news conference. It was to be limited by time and subject but not numbers of reporters.[15]

Noted earlier was the fact that Nixon experimented with the plan on three different occasions in his first term, limiting subjects to domestic issues but imposing no time constraints. The meetings were generally successful with a follow-up rate ranging as high as 50 per cent. Why Nixon failed to pursue his "fragmentary" news conferences remains a mystery unanswered in this research. Certainly they offered some promise during an uneasy period in news conference history. Expert commentary, if any, on the failure to use them frequently has not been found. Correspondence to former White House Press Secretary Ron Ziegler has gone unanswered. The crux of the news conference dilemma--instant reporting of a president's words to the world by live TV--may have been solved by the depth preparation and follow-up questions

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[15]Morgan et al., Presidency and the Press Conference, pp. 30-33.

encouraged by such a limited forum.

One reason for failing to pursue the format, though inconsistent with Nixon's philosophy of orchestrated media performances, has been suggested by George Reedy. He believes the format too restrictive, noting that in practice "it would be little more than a presidential appearance to make announcements."[16]

Unfortunately, this begs the issue. Nixon's "fragmentary" conferences did not fall into the morass predicted by Reedy. In fact when held, they were generally successful.

Past Presidential Press Secretaries Bill Moyers and Pierre Salinger have recommended the limited conferences, with their own variations. Moyers would televise them from a president's office with 12 or 15 White House regulars in attendance. Salinger believes in the plausability of one-subject press conferences, having tried more than one with Kennedy which he described as successful.[17]

In this writer's opinion the "fragmentary" format, incorporated with television network pooling, should be tested further by holding one such press conference

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[16]George Reedy, Letter to Author, September 19, 1974.

[17]McGuire, "Democracy's Confrontation, II," pp. 39-40.

each month.

Another forum developed still later in research was one offered by George Reedy during a 1974 seminar at the University of Wisconsin, Madison campus:

> I'd have one fully televised press conference each month and let that run an hour. Then, I would have three a month, one each week, in which the President would call in whatever reporters happened to be out in the lobby, for questions.
>
> You see here's the dilemma you run into: the best press conference, from the standpoint of information, is the one where the President just calls people in. There you do get an opportunity for follow-up questions. I covered a few of the Roosevelt press conferences in the closing days of the administration. They were wonderful. There were never more than six or seven of us standing around his desk. And, of course, Roosevelt loved it, there'd be a lot of fencing back and forth. He'd answer a question, you could follow-up with another question, and by the time it was over, we really had some solid information you could write a story on.
>
> Now the trouble with that is that in the modern world you aren't going to get that if you announce the [conference]. Today, every newspaperman in Washington, if he could get into a Presidential conference, would be there.
>
> On television, of course, you have to announce it. That means you have a minimum of 200, and I remember one press conference where I clocked in 405 newsmen. I counted, in the half-hour time slot, . . .about twenty questions. Once or twice we got twenty-three and once or twice eighteen, but twenty was about the average. . . .
>
> The result is at the end [reporters] run out with twenty first paragraphs and

nothing to put under the first paragraphs.[18]

Reedy offers a televised return to a mixed Roosevelt - Kennedy - format press conference. His proposal, in this writer's opinion, has three distinct advantages that were demonstrated in Roosevelt's press meetings.

First, as Reedy pointed out, it allows depth coverage of news.

Second, Reedy's proposal would greatly increase consistency in news flow. The press conferences would be on a fairly routine and frequent basis.

Third, the proposal goes to the heart of the unique two-way feature of presidential news conferences. It promotes the element of presidential feedback, not in subject areas of a president's choosing, a problem with Morgan's "fragmentary" press conference proposal.

Another press secretary of Johnson's, George E. Christian, agrees with Reedy's plan but would modify the monthly hour-long conferences:

> If a president has frequent informal news conferences, as I believe he should, 30 minutes is ample time for a televised news conference.

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[18]George Reedy, Comments at University of Wisconsin, Madison, Seminar of June 21, 1974.

> It allows 15 to 20 questions which are usually sufficient to cover the important subjects.19

Reedy's plan has its drawbacks, depending on one's outlook, however.

First, it tends to favor the White House press corps. One may say the favoritism is a benefit: that the group represents a competent and specialized branch of reporting. That is essentially the argument favoring all beat reporting. Beat reporters, however, sometimes tend to over-specialize and lose objectivity. They inevitably become wrapped into the establishment of their source.

The second drawback in Reedy's plan is that it reduces presidential flexibility with public communication during times of crisis. On one hand, the televised hour-long meeting each month could be employed (and often is) as an effective foreign policy tool, accentuating the potential value of an American presidential press conference as a means of rapid communication with world-wide publics. Such usage is not new; it started during the Eisenhower administration. The contrary side of the flexibility problem, however, might be new. A scheduled monthly televised press conference would be difficult to

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[19]George E. Christian, Letter to Author, October 28, 1974.

"unschedule" during periods of national or international political sensitivity if silence were a presidential objective. A chief executive's advantage in timing would be hindered. Reedy, in his plan, however does not call for a particular time of the month for the televised conference, so one can reduce the problem of limiting flexibility to a matter of degree. A president would have a month-long block to use in his press conference-timing selection.

In a third drawback, Reedy ignores the fact that television, as a news source, has a legitimate right to cover any news event open to other information media.

Neither the Reedy nor the Morgan solution is perfect. Using both formats and selecting the plan most advantageous under particular circumstances still leaves an imperfect press conference format. Unfortunately the structure of the meetings--in any format using live radio and TV--poses the potential danger of a Nixon-like October 26, 1973, press conference tantrum during a period of international or domestic sensitivity.

Delbert McGuire did not recommend a particular forum for news conferences in his 1967-68 study. Rather, he pointed out desirable aspects of any news conference regardless of format.

McGuire, guided by his poll of White House press corps members, suggested that timing of press conferences was

not in itself a problem. Presidents, he reasoned, have little inclination to favor either a morning or evening press in terms of deadlines. McGuire's study concluded, however, that regularity in scheduling was important.

McGuire, perhaps idealistically, also suggested internal cooperation by the press while preparing for news conferences, he suggested preparation emphasized in basic journalism reporting courses. His preparation and cooperation amount to establishing a priority for questions asked at news conferences. That was tried during the Nixon administration with cries of "conspiracy" from some newspapers as well as the White House.

He also suggested, as has Reedy, that television participation be limited to only certain meetings to avoid problems inherent with that particular medium.

McGuire suggested a follow-up question system such as that recently adopted by President Ford with apparently successful results.

He also suggested voluntary attendance limitation by the press, noting several reporters from the same newspaper in some conferences. Network pooling fits into his suggestion.

Finally, McGuire recommended against the common administration practice of planting questions with reporters. He properly pointed to use of press secretary briefings and presidential statements for that purpose.

Realistically, a planted question, like a leak, serves both the purposes of the White House and the reporter and will probably continue.

An easily implemented decorum improvement was suggested editorially by Editor & Publisher for eliminating the "jumping-jack" performance and shouting of "Mr. President" by reporters. The magazine recommended simply that reporters remain seated and raise their hands for presidential attention.[20]

Naturally, the possibilities noted above are not all-inclusive. They are offered in some detail because they represent to this writer the most plausible approaches. Others, such as eliminating presidential news conferences altogether, making them mandatory or delegating the responsibility to a vice-president, fly in the face of logic and presidential prerogatives.

A plan such as substituting the conferences with backgrounders--suggested by Clark Mollenhoff--would be functional on an occasional basis, but not at the expense of replacing news conferences.[21] Written questions, other than taking a backward step, risk accusations of "news management," on one hand, and speculation or rumor about

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[20]"Press Conference Change," Editor & Publisher, October 19, 1974, p. 6.

[21]Morgan, et al., Presidency and the Press Conference, p. 35.

passed-over questions on the other. When Walter Lippmann suggested the idea after Eisenhower's heart attack in 1955, Press Secretary James Hagerty's response was negative saying, "You might as well get speeches out of the guy."[22]

One may suggest, logically, that though imperfect as they stand, presidential press conferences should not be tampered with: allow the meetings to evolve, as they have, along with electronic media, press secretarial and presidential influences. Dwindling press meetings since 1945 suggest otherwise. Certainly presidential press conference numbers alone are not an accurate means of evaluating their value. Frequency and format, however, are methods of determining public opinion feedback available to a nation's chief decision maker.

That contention brings this conclusion full cycle: President Nixon neglected that key avenue of feedback.

New conferences, while not a communication panacea, are partial indicators of presidential exposure to public beliefs and expectations, via the press. This is particularly true in a paradoxical period of individual isolation in an environment of mass communication and big government. They protect chief executives from the isolation that was partially responsible for Nixon's

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[22] *Time*, December 26, 1955, p. 51.

historic disgrace.

Nixon failed to differentiate between one and two-way communication. This research has attempted to place his press conferences in that presidential perspective.

The development of electronic media, from the Truman to Johnson administrations, had abetted the trend toward one-way communication by presidents. Press conferences were downgraded as presidents, for any number of reasons, lost control of their spoken and printed words and were moved ever closer to instant public scrutiny as press conferences developed electronically. There is irony in the fact that while electronic media became more sophisticated, face-to-face two-way presidential communication seemed to lapse. That trend was demonstrated in Table I by showing a significant decrease in presidential press conferences as speeches and statements increased after 1945. Presidential avoidance of press meetings after the midpoint in their second term compounded the problem of infrequent conferences. Beyond those problems, certain presidents shunned news conferences more than usual as public opinion turned against them late in their administrations.

A complex and demanding public information milieu developed at the same time Richard Nixon began his political ascendancy to the Presidency. In this writer's opinion Nixon lacked many qualities seen in successful--or unsuccessful--politicians in a vocation frought with

dangers of public confrontation.

The Hiss case brought Nixon's first major clash with the press but his later "Checkers" speech and "last press conference" showed him a way of by-passing his media enemies. His disasterous Kennedy debates and successful 1968 "advertising" campaign showed him the power of a carefully orchestrated communication environment, especially one utilizing television.

His view of the media as a carrier of neatly packaged Madison Avenue advertising--one-way from him to the people--was in danger from the start of his Presidency. Another capability of the media, that of evaluation and criticism, began to make itself felt in the first year of Nixon's Presidency.

The press had generally backed Nixon in his 1968 campaign for President, and his first six months in office were basically ones of harmony with the media. By the end of his first term his "anti-media" campaign had ended the tranquility. He expressed annoyance with editors, publishers and commentators in his news-conference statements. He began a trend of reducing televised news conferences. He followed that with an approach of substituting "conversations" for traditional meetings with the media in press conferences. When he held them, the President used press attacks on him to foster a public image of an underdog. He piously proclaimed his belief

in the Fourth Estate right of free expression, even at his expense, and favored some reporters with recognition while using governmental surrogates to manipulate, harrass and attack the press. His espoused public philosophy of little concern for press conference "words" did not match his clandestine "deeds."

In the last chapter the "deeds" Nixon asked to be judged by became his betrayer. His anti-media offensive was turned to a second-term defensive as the crimes of Watergate emerged. To escape public demand for facts, Nixon turned to partisan-type press conferences before carefully selected friendly audiences. His press conference comments depicted a deepening hostility toward the press that extended from press executives down to reporter level. Nixon tried moving the press conferences away from their White House environment. He tried diverting their content to other important news areas with his opening statements.

Finally, trapped in a web of his own spinning, he stopped them altogether.

APPENDIXES

PRESIDENTIAL PRESS CONFERENCE STATEMENT OF

FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT

The following comments were made by President Roosevelt at his first press conference on March 8, 1933. They represent such a significant presidential press conference policy change that they are included here in detail. About 200 reporters were present.1

. . .My hope is that these conferences are going to be merely enlarged editions of the kind of very delightful family conferences I have been holding in Albany for the last four years.

I am told that what I am about to do will become impossible, but I am going to try it. We are not going to have any more written questions; and, of course, while I cannot answer seventy-five or a hundred questions because I simply haven't got the time, I see no reason why I should not talk to you ladies and gentlemen off the record in just the way I have been doing in Albany and in the way I used to do in the Navy Department down here. . . . There will be a great many questions, of course, that I won't answer, either because they are "if" questions--and I never answer them. . . .

And the others, of course, are the questions which for various reasons I do not want to discuss, or I am

not ready to discuss, or I do not know anything about. There will be a great many questions you will ask that I do not know enough about to answer.

Then, in regard to news announcements, Steve [Early] and I thought that it would be best that straight news for use from this office should always be without direct quotations. In other words, I do not want to be directly quoted, unless direct quotations are given out by Steve in writing. That makes that perfectly clear.

Then there are two other matters we will talk about: The first is "background information," which means material which can be used by all of you on your own authority and responsibility, not to be attributed to the White House, because I do not want to have to revive the Ananias Club.

Then the second thing is the "off the record" information which means, of course, confidential information which is given only to those who attend the conference. . . . I want to ask you not to repeat this "off the record" confidential information either to your own associates who are not here. . . .That is to say it is not to be used and not to be told to those fellows who happen not to come around to the conference. . . .

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[1]Pollard, Presidents and the Press, p. 775.

PRESIDENT NIXON: NEWS CONFERENCES

1. January 27, 1969
2. February 6, 1969
3. March 4, 1969
4. March 14, 1969
5. April 18, 1969
6. June 19, 1969
7. September 26, 1969
8. October 20, 1969
9. December 8, 1969
10. January 30, 1970
11. March 21, 1970
12. May 8, 1970
13. July 20, 1970
14. July 30, 1970
15. December 10, 1970
16. February 17, 1971
17. March 4, 1971
18. April 29, 1971
19. May 1, 1971
20. June 1, 1971
21. August 4, 1971
22. September 16, 1971
23. October 12, 1971
24. November 12, 1971
25. February 10, 1972
26. March 24, 1972
27. June 22, 1972
28. June 29, 1972
29. July 27, 1972
30. August 29, 1972
31. October 5, 1972
32. January 31, 1973
33. March 2, 1973
34. March 15, 1973
35. August 22, 1973
36. September 5, 1973
37. October 3, 1973
38. October 26, 1973
39. November 17, 1973
40. February 25, 1974
41. March 6, 1974
42. March 19, 1974

APPENDIX B

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